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PRESENTATION

The Author has studied with great care and ability the first chapter of Candrakīrti's commentary on the *Madhyamakakārikā* by the great master Nāgārjuna, in order to make it more accessible and better known to English-speaking readers. Indeed, he sees the first chapter as being undoubtedly the most important of the whole work, due both to its intrinsic worth and because it makes it easier to understand the following twenty-six chapters.

Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, with their respective works, are amongst the most eminent masters of Mādhyamika school, that T.R.V. Murti unhesitatingly defines 'the central philosophy of Buddhism.'[1] The name of the school itself can be traced back, on a gnosiological level, to the position held by the Buddha on the eve of his 'awakening', when he abandoned the excessive austerity of his life (his life was being destroyed and his achievement of the goal was being compromised), to adopt the 'middle path', equally distant from extravagant pleasures and extreme self-humiliation. It is the system that uses dialectics to allow the emptiness of the elements of existence to emerge, so as to eliminate any special theory that, as such, cannot be an absolute truth. Such a system not only makes up the central philosophy of Buddhism, but its acuteness also influences all Indian thought thereafter.

I am extremely pleased to present the essay of an exemplary man and scholar, Dr. Cesare Rizzi. After many years of theological and philosophical studies at Rome and Bologna and having acquired a particular knowledge of ancient and modern Oriental and Western languages, he went to teach Italian and Latin language and literature at the-Central University of Viśvabhāratī (founded by the poet Rabindranath Tagore in 1921) where he has been working for the Ministry of Education of Indian Union for the past six years. Naturally, Dr. Rizzi has

[1]Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism.*

taken full advantage of his long stay in India to deepen his knowledge of Sanskrit and Oriental philosophies.

Owing to his honourable scruples, he was very reluctant to publish these pages and he granted his assent only after insistent requests.

FLAVIO POLI

PREFACE

My first encounter with Indian philosophy happened some years ago when I read or, rather, studied and meditated over the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna (second-third century A.D.) : one of the most ingenious and remarkable spiritual figures of India and the whole of Asia.

In those years, I, not completely new to Christian theology, was studying Greek philosophy ("Western philosophy is the legacy of Greek philosophy"), and the beloved commentators and teachers of the Middle Ages and the celebrated masters of modern times were keeping me company, were helping me along and checking the *veritas graeca.* I got to know Nāgārjuna and it is to him that I owe my interest and my decision later on to approach the sources of Indian philosophical tradition, without having to give up my own cultural and religious roots, rather deepening and purifying them.

This short volume is largely the text of my degree thesis in philosophy, completed at the University of Bologna in the academic year 1977-8. I have examined the first chapter of the 'Clear Words' by Candrakīrti (seventh century A.D.), the celebrated commentator of Nāgārjuna. It is only a very short section of his formidable commentary, enough however to show us his art, making this paraphrase not altogether inappropriate: "Candrakīrti, che il gran commento fece"[1].

I am deeply indebted to Professor Amalia Pezzali, my thesis tutor, who introduced and guided me into the world of Indian Buddhist philosophy so unknown to me, but well known to her. I wish to thank my joint-tutors, Professor Giorgio Renato Franci and Dr. Flavio Poli for their kind help during the various stages of the work.

As I have now been absent from home for six years, I wish to express my gratefulness to my parents, who have supported and accompanied me throughout my long years of study at the

[1]"Candrakīrti, who made the great commentary" (Dante's *Inferno*, IV, 144).

Universities of Rome and Bologna. Mindful of the words of Indian wisdom: "As for dignity, a master is above ten teachers, a father above a hundred masters, a mother above anyone", and the words of divine wisdom: "Honour thy father and thy mother both in actions and in words: their blessings will come down on thee and thy prayers shall be heard", it is to them that I dedicate this work.

CESARE RIZZI

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INTRODUCTION

"THE dogmatics of the Mahāyāna had its great commentators in Sthiramati. . . in Candrakīrti who explains the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna, in Dharmapāla, etc. . . ."[1]

"The most significant personality in this group (of Prāsaṅgika philosophers) was Candrakīrti (seventh century), who made an essential commentary on the *Kārikās* by Nāgārjuna in his *Prasannapadā* (Clear Words), trying to restore the doctrine to its original purity, and he also distinguished himself in the field of logic, even without having introduced any innovations of particular importance."[2]

About twenty years elapsed between these two outlines of the personality and the work of Candrakīrti, which appeared in the last two histories of Indian philosophy by Italian scholars. The question could be raised: why should just one chapter from a single work by Candrakīrti be made the object of research?

A first series of reasons are found after an external examination of this work:

(a) The *Prasannapadā* came to us in its original Sanskrit text; in fact, we have the critical edition in the *Bibliotheca Buddhica* IV, edited at St. Petersburg from 1902 to 1913 by Louis de La Vallée Poussin.

(b) This work has been completely translated into Western languages, part of it into English (Stcherbatsky), part of it into French (Lamotte, de Jong, May) and part of it into German (Schayer).[3]

Compared to other Indian philosophical works which still await translation into European languages and have in addition only come to us in their Chinese or Tibetan versions, the *Prasan-*

[1]Tucci, *Filosofia*, p. 84.

[2]Scalabrino Borsani, *Filosofia*, p. 493.

[3]The publication of the complete Italian translation from the Sanskrit text is being planned by the Rizzoli Publishers (Milan).

napadā is undoubtedly in a better position. These considerations concern the work as a whole. To justify a detailed examination of the first chapter of the *Prasannapadā*, I can say that it is one of the longest of its twenty-seven chapters, and this is not just by chance.

But it is not so much the length as the position that counts in an Indian philosophical work. In other words, this chapter has greater importance than the following ones and it is for this reason that it is the first chapter, in the forefront, to make contact with the reader and inform him immediately about what is to be dealt with in the later pages: it puts forth the basic elements of the author's doctrine and sheds some light on the whole work. My interest in a detailed presentation was due to this. It should also be noted that the method of inquiry used by the Indian thinkers is circular rather that linear, as is the case in Greek and, generally speaking, in Western thought. They analyze the same object from various points of view, picking out different facets, running the risk of inevitable repetition, but with the advantage of having the nucleus of the object of their investigation ever present. In a commentary that follows such a method, the first pages take on a special importance, because in those are presented both the object of the analysis and the aspect of it, that at first is laid down for our consideration.

This research provides a clear example of what is being said: the first chapter of 'Clear Words' is the commentary about the first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna. The subject of the fourteen aphorisms of its first chapter is the critical appraisal of the four conditions (*pratyaya*), which had been taught in the treatises of Buddhist metaphysics. It deals with the confutation of the principle of causality, *principium stantis et cadentis* of all the structure of phenomenal reality. The other twenty-six chapters take into consideration and criticize other aspects of reality, like movement, time, aggregates, etc., always leading back the various confutations to that of the principle of causality, which is its basis and its paradigm. This first chapter thus becomes the keystone of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way', and it is the threshold to be crossed, the indispensable stage to go through in order to be able to enter and penetrate the Nāgārjunian doctrine.

If this reason is true for the master's work, then it should also be true for the disciple's work, insofar as the latter is a commentary of the former. One can deduce that the first chapter of the 'Clear Words', like the first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' holds notable interest for the understanding of the whole work of which it is a part.

A second series of reasons that justify this research derive from an internal analysis of the subject. As it has already been mentioned, the 'Clear Words' is a commentary and it is chronologically the fourth one on Nāgārjuna's 'Stanzas of the Middle Way', which could be seen as the planned manifesto of the Mādhyamika school.[1] During the three centuries approximately that elapsed between Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, the doctrine of the 'middle way' had been subject to attacks and to criticism from Buddhists and non-Buddhists. A deviation within the very same Mādhyamika school had come about with regard to Nāgārjuna's stance. Bhāvaviveka (sixth century A.D.), who was responsible for this, had experienced the influence of the logicians of the Vijñānavādins (it too being a Mahāyānic school), and had introduced some new elements into the Mādhyamika, in order to respect logic, at least formally. Although these elements were not completely unknown to Nāgārjuna, in Candrakīrti's opinion they undermined the substance of his philosophy.

In the *Prasannapadā* Candrakīrti sees how things stand and reaffirms his own faith in the original Mādhyamika thought, rigorously orthodox; he defends it from the adversaries' attacks, and treasuring those criticisms he deepens, clarifies and widens the scope of Nāgārjuna's insight.

It is, therefore, apparent that such a work should merit careful attention, should one wish to be acquainted with the doctrine and the history of the Mādhyamika school, both of which are presented to us by one of its last great representatives.

In the *Prasannapadā* we can note, by glancing through the

[1] "This designation derives from *madhyama* which is the superlative form of *madhya*, 'middle'. Strictly, the philosophy we are dealing with—the 'ism'—is the *madhyamaka*, i.e. 'middlemostism', and a member of the school would be a *mādhyamika*. By commonest (but not universal) usage, however, one refers to the philosophy, the school, and its exponent as *mādhyamika*". Sprung, *Lucid Exposition*, Note 2, p. 25.

list of contents of its twenty-seven chapters, that the subject of the first chapter, entitled 'critique of the conditions', imposes itself, thanks to its fundamental importance over the structure of the whole work. The justness of the interpretation that Nāgārjuna and his school give to reality depends on whether the principle of cause and effect is worthy of merit or not. It follows that as far as the contents are concerned, this chapter is favoured more than the others: a thorough study of it will allow a better understanding of the whole work.

Having set out these two series of reasons, the importance and interest in a detailed presentation of the first chapter of 'Clear Words' or *Prasannapadā* by Candrakīrti should be quite obvious.

In trying to highlight both the man Candrakīrti and his work the *Prasannapadā*, in the first two chapters of this book I have lingered somewhat over the history that preceded both his philosophy and his work: the history of men and the history of works. First of all, I have presented Candrakīrti in the context of the school of the 'middle way', of which I have outlined the characteristics of the founder and its leading exponents over the centuries. Then I have commented on the content of the first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' so as to understand the philosophical and historical importance of Candrakīrti's work better. The third chapter, which is the longest one, is dedicated to presenting the first chapter of the 'Clear Words' in its entirety. I have particularly stopped to examine Candrakīrti's defence of the *Prāsaṅgika* method (*reductio ad absurdum*), which, according to him, is the only one worthy and suitable of confuting the adversaries' theories. The first chapter is an example of his great art as a commentator of Nāgārjuna.

Chapter One

CANDRAKĪRTI

1. *General Overview of the 'Middle Way' School*

"If you trust tradition, nearly all the masters of the Mādhyamika school came from the south of India, that part of Deccan which marks the limits of the Bay of Bengal, to be more precise. Nevertheless, the heart of the school was situated in the medium of the Ganges basin. At Nālandā, near the ancient Rājagṛha, Emperor Kumāragupta I (415-455 *c.*) founded a large monastery, that later became a large medieval Buddhist University, which was made famous by the Mādhyamika teachers that taught there."[1]

After the space co-ordinates, the time co-ordinates. The school of the 'Middle Way" lived in India for about eight centuries, from the third to the tenth centuries A.D. It later expanded in Tibet, in China, and in Eastern Asian countries. Around the year one thousand A.D. it practically disappeared from its land of origin.

The Indian period of the Mādhyamika school is usually divided into four successive stages that can be indicated by listing the philosophers that characterized them.[2] Schematically speaking, these are:

(1) (Third-fourth century): Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva
(2) (Fifth-sixth century): Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka
(3) (Seventh century–first half of the eighth century): Candrakīrti and Śāntideva.
(4) (Second half of the eighth century–tenth century): Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla.

The fourth phase of the Mādhyamika school, coming after Candrakīrti, lies outside the scope of this research. Furthermore,

[1]Bareau, *Bouddhisme*, p. 146.
[2]Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 87ff; Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, p.194ff.

Śāntarakṣita (725-788 *c.*), after having been appointed abbot in Nālandā, went to Tibet to spread Buddhism. He and his renowned disciple and commentator Kamalaśīla are called 'svātantrika-yogācāra'. Indeed they head towards a positive aspect of 'emptiness', as Bhāvaviveka had already done, but unlike him, they make the conception that the Yogācāra have the empirical world of their own. If Candrakīrti has so fiercely attacked Bhāvaviveka's philosophical stance, he would have *a fortiori* rebelled against such a re-inteıpretation of Nāgārjuna's thought. Instead, it becomes indispensable—in order to understand the role performed better by Candrakīrti in his time—to pause somewhat on the first two stages of the Mādhyamika school.

2. *Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva*

The personalities of Nāgārjuna (243-310/320 *c.*) and Āryadeva (270-340 *c.*) dominate the beginnings of Mādhyamika school. This philosophical school, which was chronologically the first to be born from the Mahāyāna womb, resolved to arrange the new ideas featured in the *Prajñāpāramitā* ('Perfection of Wisdom') literature by hinging on vacuity (*śūnyatā*) both of things (*dharma*) and of 'persons' (*pudgala*). With reason, it is also called "the school of emptiness" (*śūnyavāda*).

If Nāgārjuna with his activity as a teacher and writer laid down the foundation of this doctrine, then Āryadeva, who was his most celebrated disciple and immediate successor, brought it to fulfilment. Indeed, he commented on the main works of his own teacher and especially dedicated himself, unlike Nāgārjuna, to confuting the theories of non-Buddhist Indian philosophical schools.

Nāgārjuna's fundamental insight is that with regard to any reality one cannot argue whether it exists or not because existence and non-existence, being opposite concepts, are placed in extreme positions. But one extreme cannot avoid opposing the other, something positive needs something negative, so they cancel themselves out reciprocally due to this contrast and need of one another. It follows that the only correct stance is to follow the 'middle path (or way)' (*madhyamā pratipad*), which avoids the total domination of one extreme over the other. Only by tak-

ing this path can one reach peace (*śānti*), which is conscience, awareness of identity of every pair of opposites.

All reality, beginning with what surrounds us up to *nirvāṇa*, in that it exists, or at least so believed, is opposed to the reality that does not exist. They are two extreme positions, opposed, interdependent on each other and related to each other. It is, therefore, useless and illusory to wonder which one has its own essence (*svabhāva*), when this concept also springs from the contrast with its opposite, upon which it depends. The only name that can be attributed to reality is vacuity (*śūnyatā*): reality is empty of its own essence. But even the very 'vacuity' is empty: it does not have divisions, it is neither one nor many, it is identified with peace (*śānti*).

Taking this doctrine of universal vacuity as a base, Nāgārjuna built an ontology that has, among other things, strong mystical traits. All of this within the Mahāyāna is something philosophically new and original. But to be able to arrive at such a result, Nāgārjuna made use of formidable dialectic, so as to allow himself to overcome every kind of dualism. In this way he brought the effort of generations of Buddhists, who aimed at transcending not only *saṃsāra* but also *nirvāaṇa*, to a logical and conscious end.

3. *Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka*

We do not know much about the disciples of Āryadeva, as none of their works has reached us directly. A famous Mādhyamika philosopher was undoubtedly Saṃgharakṣita, who lived at the beginning of the fifth century. It was the work of two followers of the latter, namely Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka, that caused the Mādhyamika system, which had remained united for over two centuries, to split into two conflicting schools.

Buddhapālita, who lived in the first half of the fifth century, was a firm supporter of the Nāgārjunian dialectic, and a strenuous defender of the *reductio ad absurdum* (*prasaṅga vākya*), which he used without the slightest concession to the opposing theories. He argues that the authentic Mādhyamika philosopher cannot

have his own personal theory and must not make use of syllogisms as also of particular examples to construct and explain it.[1] Only if he acts in this way, that is, if he limits himself to demonstrating how all theories, whether expressed in negative or affirmative formulations, make no sense whatsoever, does one avoid understanding vacuity as something positive, almost as if it concerned another particular theory. This last point would be no less wrong than the doctrines, which have turned out to be absurd.

Bhāvaviveka, also named Bhāvya, is also supposed to be a disciple of Saṃgharakṣita, and contemporary of Buddhapālita, even if this last statement raises more than just one problem, to the point that for some scholars he is placed in the sixth century A.D.[2] Unlike his co-disciple Buddhapālita, and in conflict with him, Bhāvaviveka argued that it is not enough to limit oneself to destroying the opinions of other thinkers: it is necessary to set one's own doctrinal stance against them. In this way, Nāgārjuna's thinking is not betrayed. On the contrary, it is developed by putting into effect all the potential present in his aphorisms.

It is undeniable that Bhāvaviveka was influenced both by the opinions of the Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda school, a Mahāyānic school born in that period, and above all by the Buddhist logic school, also born and expanded in the fifth century A.D. Some apparent traces of that logic can be found in his way of interpreting Nāgārjuna's teaching, by relying on the validity of knowledge and on the development of the syllogism in sight of a conclusion (*svatantra*). For this reason the school he founded has been called 'svātantrika', in opposition to the 'prāsaṅgika', led by Buddhapālita. What distinguishes and sets them one against the other is that one makes use of an essentially negative argumentation, whereas the other resorts to a positive dialectic, taking advantage of all those psychological and logical acquisitions originating from the non-Mādhyamika Buddhist thinkers of that time.

In short, the 'prāsaṅgika' school looks back to the past, to the origins of the Madhyamika system to find once again the most

[1]Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, pp. 135ff.
[2]Frauwallner, *Buddhismus*, p. 224.

fertile and characteristic elements of that philosophy. On the other hand, the 'svātantrika' school projects itself more towards the future and it joins up with other flourishing philosophical schools of that time, searching for new techniques and data, so as to re-vitalize a philosophy which would otherwise risk fossilizing and which would no longer be able to face other philosophical experiences or commonplace human experience.

4. *Candrakīrti*

The third phase of the history of the Mādhyamika school is characterized by two personalities who are amongst the most interesting of the whole school and represent its two souls, the philosophical one and the mystical one, that live side by side in the school and have been present in an exemplary way in its founder, Nāgārjuna. Candrakīrti and Śāntideva are the last two major representatives of the authentic Mādhyamika doctrine, even if each one underlines some particular aspect.

Śāntideva, who lived between the end of the seventh century and the first half of the eighth century, besides being a considerable thinker, is above all a great mystic, who was able to unite a deep religiousness and joy of exposure together with the unquestioned Mādhyamika orthodoxy.[1] An example of this is his famous work in verse, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, "the descent in the career of the awakening". In that work he describes, stage by stage, the walk that the Bodhisattva must go along to reach "the thought of the awakening". "Śāntideva adds the vigour of religious warmth to philosophical criticism: the intellectual search and mental acceptance are not simply translated into a practice of a rational and ethical life, but they are enriched with the mystical exuberance and depth that transform the tasteless prosaic everyday routine into a chant of glory that reaches up to the Absolute. He develops the Mādhyamika as a poem of spiritual life, that touches the universal and human in an essential lyricism."[2]

About a century before Śāntideva, the Mādhyamika school had another great representative, Candrakīrti ("whose fame

[1]Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, pp. 156ff.
[2]Pezzali, *Śāntideva*, p. 106.

shines like the moon"), whose main interest was the defence and reaffirmation of the original principles of the "middle way" and of the 'prāsaṅgika'[1] method.

According to the historians Bu-ston and Tārānātha, *Candrakīrti* was a native of southern India. He lived at the end of the sixth century and in the first part of the seventh century, *c.* 580-660. Having entered the order as a young man, he studied the Buddhist scriptures under the guidance of his teacher Kamalabuddhi, a secondary figure, practically unknown to us. This master is supposed to have been both Buddhapālita's disciple as well as Bhāvaviveka's master (?), probably pronouncing himself in favour of the former.

Even if Candrakīrti is above all famous for his lucid and profound commentary of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, his oldest work is an independent treatise that is often quoted in his comments. It is called *Madhyamakāvatāra*, "the descent of the Madhyamaka", which we have in the Tibetan version.[2] It is a summary, in verse, of his teaching, and it describes the path consisting of ten stages (*bhūmi*), that the *bodhisattva* must walk along to reach the awakening (*bodhi*).

He himself later wrote a commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*. He also composed other independent works:

(i) the *Samantabhadra*, the "all good", which is a grammatical treatise in verse;
(ii) the *Madhyamakaprajñāvatāra*, "the descent of the Madhyamaka wisdom";
(iii) the *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*, "the treatise of the five aggregates".

The latter two works have reached us in the Tibetan version.

But it is the following two commentaries that have consecrated Candrakīrti as one of the major philosophers of the Mādhyamika school. They are:

[1]Murti, *Central Philosophy*, pp. 98ff; Frauwallner, *Buddhismus*, pp. 241ff; Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, pp. 147ff; Bareau, *Bouddhisme*, p. 161.

[2]*Madhyamakāvatāra* de Candrakīrti. *Édition de la version tibétaine par L. de La Vallée Poussin*, St. Pétersbourg, 1907-1912. (*Bibl. Buddh.*, vol. 9). *Traduction francaise* (incomplète) *par de La Vallée Poussin*, *Muséon*, t. VIII, 1907, pp. 249-317; t. XI, 1910, pp. 271-358; t.XII, 1911, pp. 235-327.

(i) the *Prasannapadā*, "the one whose words are clear", a vast organic comment on the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by *Nāgārjuna*. That work, which is the fruit of his maturity and his masterpiece, reached us wholly in Sanskrit;

(ii) the *Catuḥśatakavṛtti*, "a commentary on the four hundred verses" by Āryadeva.[1] It is a work of considerable importance: we possess only the complete Tibetan version of it, and some sections in Sanskrit.

[1]Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, p. 121, n.3.

Chapter Two

THE 'COMMENTARY ON THE MIDDLE WAY IN CLEAR WORDS' BY CANDRAKĪRTI

I. *The First Chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna*

"Before the mighty strokes of the destructive dialectic of Nāgārjuna and his commentator Candrakīrti, the entire structure of phenomenal objects crumbles down like a house of cards or a palace on sand. The external objects and the individual subject, matter, motion, causality, time, space, thinghood, qualities, relation, attributes, substance, soul, God, religion, morality, the four Noble Truths, Nirvāṇa and the Buddha are all found to be hypostatised relations. But from the empirical viewpoint they are all quite real, though ultimately they are all merged in the bosom of the Absolute."[1]

"Nāgārjuna summarised the basic themes of his own philosophical doctrine in a series of 445 verses, worded in an extremely concise style, often mnemonic and obscure, which were destined to be learnt by heart and commented upon. These *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*, ("basic didactic verses of the walk or path or system of the middle way") or *Mādhyamikasūtras*, "aphorisms of the middle way", make up the *Mādhyamikaśāstra*, "the treatise of the middle way", which is still today the essential work of the Mādhyamika school, and that over the centuries has been the object of numerous Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese commentaries."[2]

That work is sub-divided into twenty-seven chapters, and each one criticizes either a fact, an aspect or a category of the reality we are embedded in. Some chapters are unsurpassed examples of the logical rigour and dialectical depth of the master Nāgārjuna.

The 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' open with a double homage: giving praise to the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī, who is the

[1]Sharma, *Indian Philosophy*, pp. 89-90.
[2]May, *Madhyamakavṛtti*, p. 5.

patron of the teachers of the 'dharma', the grammarians and of the scholars in general. Praise is also given to the Buddha, the best of the teachers, who has taught men about the conditioned co-production (*pratītyasamutpāda*). From the point of view of the absolute truth, conditioned co-production is identified with nirvāṇa, which is the pacification of every unfolding of discursive thought.

According to Nāgārjuna, from such an absolute point of view, there is neither cessation (*nirodha*) nor production (*utpāda*); neither destruction (*uccheda*) nor eternity (*śāśvata*); neither unity (*ekārtha*) nor multiplicity (*nānārtha*); neither coming, arrival (*āgama*) nor departure (*nirgama*).[1]

Nāgārjuna reaches this conclusion after having engaged his own dialectic in a work where all the beliefs that seem to be incontrovertible to the common man were subjected to demolition. To Nāgārjuna "the dialectic is a series of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments (*prasaṅgāpādanam*). Every thesis is turned against itself."[2] That method consists in showing up all these opinions, or theories or partial truths to be absurd, or at least paradoxical, likewise their opposites, that are meant to conceive and explain reality, as much the inner as the outer one. The identification between reality and vacuity, therefore, does not turn out absurd: every entity, devoid of its own nature, is relative and does not exist unless it is in relation to its own opposite.

At the beginning of his own work, Nāgārjuna proclaims the doctrine of 'non-origin': "Never has any being born from itself, from another, from both or without cause existed."[3] An entity cannot rise up, be born or be produced from itself. If the effect already exists in its very cause, it is already an existing fact that does not need any further production. If the effect does not exist

[1]"*Anirodham anutpādam anucchedam / aśāśvatam anekārtham anānārtham anāgamam anirgamam*" // (*MMK*, prologue). "Neither perishing nor arising, neither terminable nor eternal. Neither self-identical nor variant in form, neither coming nor going." Sprung, *Lucid Exposition*, p. 32.

[2]Murti, *Central Philosophy*, p. 131.

[3]*MMK*, I, 1. "*Na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyām nāpy ahetutaḥ/ utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana*"//

Cf. Sprung, *Lucid Exposition*, p. 36: "No things whatsoever exist, at any time, in any place, having arisen of themselves, from another, from both or without cause."

in its own cause, nothing can produce it, as nothing can produce a horn on a hare or a son to a sterile woman. And if an entity cannot rise up by itself, how can it rise up from the 'non-self'? To argue that the entity can be born from both, that is from itself and from the non-self, is tantamount to saying that light and dark can coexist. And certainly nothing can rise by chance or without cause.

This particular scheme of refutation, which Nāgārjuna uses in the analysis of the doctrine of the 'non-origin' and that is articulated into four alternative positions is called *catuṣkoṭi*, or 'tetralemma'. Due to its frequent use by philosophers of the Mādhyamika school and also by others, it is worthwhile pausing briefly to examine it more closely, with reference to the text which has just been studied.[1]

In Buddhist philosophical literature of the origins of the notion of the four alternative positions, that prepare for and anticipate the *catuṣkoṭi*, or 'tetralemma', appears in the accounts relating to the following matters:

(a) whether or not a *tathāgata* exists after death,
(b) whether or not the world has an end,
(c) whether or not the world is eternal.

In each of these cases, the nature of a given entity and of its relation to a predicate is analysed in such a way that every possible conceptual standpoint is explored. Indeed, an entity and its predicate can be conceptually related to each other only within the terms of these four limiting positions. So we can wonder whether a *tathāgata* exists, or does not exist, or whether at the same time he exists anddoes not exist, or else he neither exists nor does not exist; if the world (of living beings, *loka*) is finite or infinite, or if it is at the same time finite and infinite, or if it is neither finite nor infinite; and if the world (of living beings) is eternal or if it is non-eternal, or whether it is at the same time eternal and non-eternal, or whether it is neither eternal nor non-

[1]In the presentation of the *catuṣkoṭi* in the Buddhist thought of the origins, its use by the school of the 'middle way' and by Nāgārjuna in *MMK*, I, 1 ,we turned to an excellent and exhaustive article by D. Seyfort Ruegg in *JIPh* 5 (1977), pp. 1-71, and especially to pages 1-4; 20-1; 58-9.

eternal. In addition to such questions, Buddhist canonical literature mentions the one concerning the relationship between a vital principle (*jīva*, 'soul') and the body which is considered in terms of only two positions: if they are different or if instead they are not.

Of the fourteen points mentioned, twelve concern three questions, each of which is investigated in relation to four positions, and two regard a single question, investigated in relation to two positions. The Buddha himself refused to give an answer to these problems, and was suspected of ignorance or agnosticism by some of his disciples who had raised the problem. In reality it is impossible to give a useful answer to these questions, and they have to be put aside, insofar as from the point of view of salvation a solution to them would in no way contribute to progress along the way that leads to the awakening (*bodhi*). The fact that some questions had either been put aside or left unresolved, can be explained both pedagogically and psychologically, in relation to the propensions or inclinations of the questioner, both logically and semantically, due to the empty nature of the term which acts as subject and its relation to a predicate, like the empty notion of the son of a sterile woman, to which no qualification can be reasonably applied.

In the literature of the Mādhyamika school the term '*catuṣkoṭi*' is not expressly used either by Nāgārjuna or by Āryadeva, nor by Candrakīrti. But the four positions of the 'tetralemma' frequently appear from the very beginning of the literature of this school, where they are either explicitly or implicitly denied: each position (*koṭi*)—the positive one (I), the negative one (II), the one consisting of a combination or union of the positive and negative (III), and the one that consists in a double negation of the positive one and the negative one (IV)—is denied. The negation can be expressed either in a single grammatical word or in the predicate of a sentence. Therefore, the negation is formally: either the negation of a term or the negation of a predicate.

The positions of the 'tetralemma' have been used in the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' to analyse:

(1) the concept of causation or of 'non-origin',
(2) the totality of the elements on a relative or phenomenal plane,

(3) the fact-of-the-condition in the context of the ultimate reality, of the absolute truth,
(4) the existence of the *tathāgata* ('thus-gone', it being an epithet for the Buddha),[1]
(5) *nirvāṇa*.

The four positions of the 'tetralemma' appear in the analysis and in the refusal of production, or causation, or birth of the entities in *MMK*, I, 1: "Never has any being born from itself, from another, from both or without cause existed."

The most important commentators of the two principal trends of the Mādhyamika school—Bhāvaviveka for the svātantrika trend and Candrakīrti for the prāsaṅgika trend—agree in the belief that the above-mentioned statements must be interpreted as negations, that do not commit the person who accepts them to state assertions which contradict them. In other words, they are considered to be cases of absolute negation, so that the negation, shall we say, that something is produced from itself, does not commit one to stating that something is produced from something else.

Besides, Candrakīrti observes that, since speculation based on the dichotomy of self-existence (*svabhāva*) and of other-existence (*parabhāva*) and of existence and non-existence is in contrast with the teachings of the Buddha, intelligent people will never devote themselves to any of these opinions or speculative adventures.

The philosophers of the school of the 'middle way' have denied all the four positions of the *catuṣkoṭi*, insomuch as they believe that, either separately or in combination, these cannot definitely apply themselves to any 'dharma' whatsoever: the universe of words, together with all the dichotomizing concepts, is thus cancelled out.

The first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way', entitled 'Critique of the Conditions', contains the confutation of the four conditions (*pratyaya*) of all reality, that were taught in the treatises of Buddhist metaphysics. They are:

[1]Or 'thus-come', the interpretation of the term being uncertain. Another common epithet is *sugata*, 'the well-gone' (*su-gata*).

(1) the cause-condition (*hetu*);
(2) the basic-condition (*ālambana*), that is the cause of the production of thought (*citta*) and of the mental or instantaneous states (*caitta*);
(3) the antecedent-condition (*śamanantara*), that immediately precedes the termination of the cause; it is the moment preceding the one considered as an effect and it functions as a cause;
(4) the determining-condition or leading-condition (*adhipati*), which is the indirect influence of an entity on another.

"A producing cause (*hetu*) is an impossibility because if a cause has non-essence it is like a hare's horn, and how can a cause have any essence, when neither an existing thing nor a non-existing thing nor a thing which is both, can be produced? So is the case with an object (*ālambana*). If in the beginning, a subject arises independently of an object, how can the subject afterwards depend on its objective counterpart? Again, when things do not exist, how can they disappear? Therefore, there can be no immediately preceding moment (*samanantara*). Moreover, if an immediately preceding moment disappears, how can it be a cause? If a seed is destroyed, then what is that which will be called the cause of a sprout? Again, if things are relative, they cannot have an independent existence or ultimate reality. And a thing which is not real can be neither produced nor destroyed. So the decisive factor (*adhipati*) or the formula "this being, that arises" (*asmin sati idam bhavati*) becomes nonsense. Hence in none of these four *pratyayas*, neither singly nor jointly, can we find the so-called 'effect'. And if it does not exist in them, how can it be produced out of them? If the effect pre-exists in the cause, then milk should be called curd and threads should be called cloth. And if the effect does not pre-exist in the cause, then curd should be produced out of water and cloth should be produced out of reeds. In the former case, the effect is already an existent fact and its repeated birth is nonsense; in the latter case, the effect is like a hare's horn and cannot be produced. So production in all cases is an impossibility. Both cause and effect are relative and therefore causality is only an appear-

ance, not reality."[1] "Condition cannot logically exist either in relation to a thing that does not exist or in relation to a thing that does exist. How can there be a condition of something that does not exist? And what need of a condition does a thing that exists have?."[2]

In the following twenty-six chapters of his work, Nāgārjuna confutes other aspects of reality. Here are some: motion, the sense faculties, the material objects and the other factors of personal existence, desire and the other afflictions, the binding and the liberation of the elements of the phenomenal world, the act and its result, the self, that is identified with me and mine, time, the *tathāgata*, the four noble truths, *nirvāṇa*, the law of conditioned production (*pratītyasamutpāda*), etc.: every element of existence is conditioned by another.

"Chapter by chapter, the Mādhyamika system criticizes the data, notions or fundamental categories of ancient Buddhism one after the other: psycho-physical data that makes up the human being, passions that touch the human compound (lust, aversion, error), act and agent, subject of the perceptive faculties etc. . . . Or he reconsiders and deepens the critique of the data that had already been refused by ancient Buddhism, such as the personal substance. This critique dissolves its objects, that lose their being and are reduced to relations that are themselves non-existent, lacking in nature of their own. . . . After having eradicated any shadow of being in oneself from the relative, the Mādhyamika system restores it insofar as it is relative, and this is done in virtue of practical considerations. All ontology is concerned with liberation: it is at the same time an explanation of the world and an instrument of salvation."[3]

2. *The Commentaries on the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' Prior to Candrakīrti*

It is a traditional belief that before Candrakīrti, other celebrated masters of the Mādhyamika school had commented on the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna.

[1] Sharma, *Indian Philosophy*, pp. 90-1.
[2] *MMK*, I, 6.
[3] May, *Madhyamakavṛtti*, pp. 16-17; 21.

In fact, the first of such commentaries is attributed to the very same Nāgārjuna. We refer here to the *Akutobhayā*, "the one who fears no danger, from wherever it should come". The authenticity of this work, however, is even questioned by the Tibetans, who are not generally very critical, so that it was still attributed to Nāgārjuna almost automatically, not for well-founded reasons,[1] as many scholars have noticed.[2]

The authors of the second and third commentaries are the founders of the two opposing schools, that appeared within the Mādhyamika system towards the end of the fifth century A.D. In addition, the only work of Buddhapālita, the founder of the 'prāsaṅgika' school, that has reached us is only in the Tibetan version, and it is, in fact, a long comment in prose on the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna. By the founder of the 'svātantrika' school, Bhāvaviveka, however, several works have reached us, even if only in Tibetan and Chinese. Among them, there is a long commentary on the 445 *kārikās* by Nāgārjuna, the *Prajñāpradīpa*, "the lamp of wisdom", in which he firmly and clearly contests the dialectic method of Buddhapālita.[3]

T.R.V. Murti, in the series of the commentators of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' that he proposed, after having listed Nāgārjuna himself, Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka, cites Guṇamati and Sthiramati[4] before Candrakīrti. Their comments, however, have not been preserved, and this may be an indication that their contribution to the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's aphorisms is of little relevance.

3. *The 'Commentary on the Middle Way in Clear Words' or Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti*

"The most illustrious of all the commentaries on the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna is the *Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti*, composed by the teacher Candrakīrti in about 600 A.D. We have given the title of the work in its complete form, as it is found in the colophons of its twenty-seven chapters, and

1Stcherbatsky, *Nirvāṇa*, p. 66; Bareau, *Bouddhisme*, p. 159.

2See for example, Ruegg: *Literature*, pp. 47-8 and note; Lindtner, Christian: *Nāgārjuna*, Copenhagen (Akademisk Forlag), 1982, p. 15 and note.

3Bareau, *Bouddhisme*, pp. 160-1.

4Murti, *Central Philosophy*, pp. 88-9, n.5.

it can be translated as "commentary (*vṛtti*) on the middle way (*Mādhyamika*), drawn up in crystal clear (*prasanna*) words (*padā*)." It is commonly abbreviated as *Prasannapadā*, and sometimes as *Madhyamakavṛtti*. In the latter case, it would be opportune to always add on the author's name: "the *Madhyamakavṛtti* by Candrakīrti", since *Madhyamakavṛtti* (or *Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti* is a general title, which is applied to all the commentaries of the *kārikās* by Nāgārjuna."[1]

With regard to the use of the term *Prasannapadā*, the interpretation provided by Theodore Stcherbatsky is interesting, or even seductive. He has written: "Candrakīrti has given to his comment the title of 'The Clearworded' (*prasanna-padā*) probably not without some dose of irony, since, as Prof. Wassilieff attests, its extreme dialectical subtlety, especially in the first chapter, is equalled by no other work in the whole domain of Northern Buddhist literature."[2]

As has already been said, the *Prasannapadā* reached us in the original Sanskrit text, wholly preserved and edited by Louis de La Vallée Poussin during the years 1902 to 1913.[3]

We also possess a Tibetan version of the *Prasannapadā* dating back to the beginning of the twelfth century, which is quite remarkable due to the precision it has in rendering the nuances of the original Sanskrit terminology. In that way it constitutes a precious test of the later Sanskrit manuscripts, and the fact that several translators have put it after their translations into European languages is symptomatic of the credit it enjoys. On the other hand, there are no Chinese translations of the *Prasannapadā* that are ancient enough.[4]

The translation of the *Prasannapadā* into European languages, as has already been pointed out in the introduction,[5] is unabridged, but is owed to various authors in different languages.[6]

1May, *Madhyamakavṛtti*, p. 5.

2Stcherbatsky, *Nirvāṇa*, p. 75, n.1.

3See *supra*, p. xi.

4May, *Madhyamakavṛtti*, pp. 6-7.

5See *supra*, p. xi.

6In order of chapters the names of the translators, the year of publication, and the language used are listed:

i	Stcherbatsky	1927	English
ii-iv	May	1959	French

A seventeen-chapters translation into English has recently appeared by M. Sprung.[1]

The twenty-seven chapters of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna, do not apparently all have the same importance, and so it is logical to expect a greater or lesser exegetic commitment from the commentators according to the subjects they deal with. Even Candrakīrti follows this rule.

For example, he dedicates one of the most detailed and challenging comments of the entire *Prasannapadā* to the XXIV chapter, where he examines and confutes the four noble truths (*āryasatya*) of Buddhism. Indeed, in this chapter Nāgārjuna presents, with admirable clarity and simplicity, the conception of the two truths or different levels of reality: the "truth of the wrapping" (*saṃvṛtisatya*), that covers and hides the real nature of things, and deals with the relative, phenomenal truth, and the "ultimate, absolute truth" (*paramārthasatya*), that is opposed to it and is identified with the emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

Candrakīrti even pays considerable attention to chapter XV entitled: 'Critique of one's own nature'. The notion of *svabhāva*, that literally means "existence or being or one's own (*sva*) nature (*bhāva*)," is of fundamental importance in the philosophy of the school of the 'middle way'. Schematically speaking, here are the different meanings that the term *svabhāva* takes on in Candrakīrti:

1. "On the conventional level, the belief that reality is composed of entities possessing *svabhāva* is not questioned. On this level, it is correct to say that heat is the *svabhāva* of fire, since heat is invariably a property of fire.

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v	Schayer	1931	German
vi-ix	May	1959	French
x	Schayer	1931	German
xi	May	1959	French
xii-xvi	Schayer	1931	German
xvii	Lamotte	1936	French
xviii-xxii	de Jong	1949	French
xxiii-xxiv	May	1959	French
xxv	Stcherbatsky	1927	English
xxvi-xxvii	May	1959	French

[1]See *Bibliography*, p. 63.

2. Next, it is denied that the conventional *svabhāva* is truly *svabhāva*. Things arise through dependence on causes and conditions. Therefore, they, and all their qualities, are contingent and dependent; but *svabhāva* is defined to be noncontingent and independent.

3. The fact that things lack *svabhāva* is invariably true and not contingent on any particular circumstances. Therefore, that fact itself could be said to be their *svabhāva*.

4. The *svabhāva* of level three is purely negative. Thus it is not the same as the *svabhāva* considered on level one; it is, in fact, the negation of it.

5. Finally, even to say that *svabhāva* does not exist is to imply that either oneself or one's audience is not entirely free from the belief in *svabhāva*. Therefore, ultimate truth, truth as it is for those who are free from misknowledge, cannot be expressed by asserting either the existence or the nonexistence of *svabhāva*."[1]

The comment on the first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' is very important. In fact this comment presents itself as a true and proper introduction. Candrakīrti does not limit himself to commenting on Nāgārjuna by enunciating the general principles of the Mādhyamika critique and by pointing out the essential methods that it uses, especially the *prasaṅga*, but he presents his own doctrinal standpoints, putting them forward in a historical way from the discussion of the theories of Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka and the school of the Yogācāra.[1] Among the latter,

[1]*AMES*, *Svabhāva*, pp. 174-5.

[1]"The school of the Yogācāra, 'the ones who practice yoga' or of the Vijñānavādin, 'the ones who teach conscience', probably began in the fourth century A.D., a period in which Asaṅga, traditionally thought to be the founder of the school, and his famous brother Vasubandhu are supposed to have lived. Nāgārjuna, having lived before and having given a systematic form in a philosophical tone to the doctrine of the Mahāyāna, in some way influenced the formation of the Yogācāra school. It, however, separates itself from the Mādhyamika insubstantialism and admits a mental reality (*vijñāna*), so that one can say that the Vijñānavādin attitude is clearly positively based. Even this school rests on vacuity (*śūnyatā*), but it does not use Nāgārjuna's critical method in the same way. Moreover, it exalts *yoga* as a practical method and it attaches importance to conscience (*vijñāna*) from the theoretical point of view. Things, according to the Vijñānavādin, only exist as an object of knowledge, they are in other words mental phenomena (*caitta*). Everything is a conscious representation (*vijñapti*) and thought (*citta*). There is a consciousness-receptacle (*ālaya-*

Candrakīrti aimed particularly at Diṅnāga, one of the most famous thinkers of this school, who lived according to some in the fifth century A.D. and according to others at the beginning of the sixth century.

Diṅnāga gave a decisive impulse to the birth and affirmation of a positive logic within his school, to such an extent that he was held to be the founder of Buddhist logic. Having based himself on Yogācāra idealism, he recognized two criteria (*pramāṇa*) of knowledge, that is direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*), whose validity he demonstrates. The analysis of inference, its different forms, the relation among its terms, taken up and developed by Dharmakīrti,[1] constitutes one of the most beautiful monuments of logic and of Indian thought.[2] This very logic is confuted by Candrakīrti, as useless thought process, that gets further away from the right knowledge, that is the perfection of knowledge.[3] And he accomplishes this criticism in a long and passionate discussion with Candragomin, his contemporary and disciple second in rank to Diṅnāga.

Candrakīrti's work supposes the reader's familiarity not only with Sanskrit, in general, but also with the philosophical terminology of the schools. It, therefore, risks being missed by the Western philosophers, in spite of the eminent place it would deserve in a general view and not a European-centred one of philosophy. But one has to recognize that it is highly embarrassing having to translate technical terms into everyday language. It is not done when one deals with Greek terms and one has to forgive the Sanskritists for what is accepted from the Hellenists. Communication, however, is still difficult among those who are

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vijñāna), which is the support of the knowable (*jñeyāśraya*). It is made up of an accumulation of traces or impregnations (*vāsanā*) left by the whole series of anterior phenomena. These impregnations grow, being in the consciousness receptacle, like seeds (*bīja*) and so produce new mental phenomena just for their own possible ripening. This consciousness-receptacle is thus not an already stable thing, but a perennial dynamism which processes the incessant current of existence phenomena." Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, pp. 181-4.

[1]Seventh century A.D. He was the last exponent of this school and a celebrated logician.

[2]Bareau, *Bouddhisme*, p. 197

[3]Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, p. 155.

not at the same time Western philosophers and Sanskritists, experts of Indian culture.[1]

[1]Filliozat, J. Conclusion of the account on the book by Phyllis Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument in late Vedānta: Śrī Harṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1978), in '*Journal Asiatique*' CCLXIX (1981), p. 511.

Chapter Three

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE 'CLEAR WORDS' BY CANDRAKĪRTI: 'CRITIQUE OF THE CONDITIONS'

1. *Homage to the Master Nāgārjuna and the Basic Subject of his Treatise: 'Stanzas of the Middle Way'*

Candrakīrti begins his commentary by giving his greetings to Nāgārjuna, to whom he wove a eulogy exalting the merits acquired from him for his activity as master. It is in virtue of his teaching that by now it is no longer possible to "resort to the abode of duality."[1] Indeed, Nāgārjuna has indicated the "middle path or way" (*madhyamā pratipad*) that goes beyond the two opposed theses that everything exists and that nothing exists. This middle path corresponds quite well to "the spirit of the supreme Buddha". In such words is evident the reference to the doctrine of the Buddha, as the body of the law (*dharmakāya*), which is the fundamental conception of the Mahāyāna.[2]

And this is the "profound meaning of the religious treasure, explained in a merciful way"[3] by Nāgārjuna. The faithful followers of the 'little vehicle', Hīnayāna, had only understood the 'middle way' from an ethical point of view: two extremes had to be avoided: pleasure and austerity, but they had not grasped the deep meaning of it, on a speculative and metaphysical plane.[4]

According to Candrakīrti, the philosophical fire of Nāgārjunian

[1]The two extremes, one opposed to the other.

[2]"It is within the Mahāyāna that the theory of the three bodies is elaborated. The 'awakened' becomes the unity of perfection like the manner of being impersonal, i.e. it is the body of the law (*dharmakāya*). When it is personalised, taking on a name and a form for the joy of the beings, it acquires a glorious body (*saṃbhogakāya*) and it later reaches the stage of taking a manifest body (*nirmāṇakāya*), a magic creation, for the good of the beings, driven on by great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*)." Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, p. 25.

[3]Because its goal is salvation for everyone. Nāgārjuna is a bodhisattva.

[4]Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, pp. 87-8.

thought still burns out the fuel of the opposite positions and it destroys the darkness in the hearts of simple men, thus affirming the validity of the Mādhyamika's dialectics centuries after Nāgārjuna. The latter's words envelop an incomparable knowledge; like a hail of arrows they completely destroy our enemies' army;[1] they free us from the bonds of phenomenal existence, the saṃsāric cycle; and they are law for the inhabitants of all other spheres of existence,[2] for the converted Buddhists and for the very same gods.

Candrakīrti concludes his prologue stating that he proposes to write an explanation of Nāgārjuna's aphorisms in clear phrases (*prasanna* = clear; *padā* = verses, phrases), containing their right interpretation, sometimes obscured by the "dialectical fires."[3]

Which are the conditions to reach the 'awakening' (*bodhi*), required by those who dedicate themselves to the learning of the 'perfection of wisdom' (*prajñāpāramitā*)?

To this preliminary query, Candrakīrti, replies by referring to one of his own previous works, "the descent of the Madhyamaka" (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), in which he had stated that the first step to take to reach the Buddhahood or universal knowledge (*sarvajñāna*) is the promise, or the commitment to devote oneself to the emancipation of all living creatures. That kind of vow must be in harmony with a right vision of the universe and it must be inspired by a sentiment of great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*). He calls Nāgārjuna the venerable master who, equipped with the fair and solid method of the Mādhyamika system, revealed in the preaching about the *prajñāpāramitā*, liberally consented to formulate it in a treatise for other people's enlightenment.

Candrakīrti wonders what the basic subject of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' actually is, and he comes right across him in the words of praise addressed by Nāgārjuna to the Buddha. In his initial prayer, the master Nāgārjuna reveals the basic subject

[1] I.e.: our passions and even the obstacles of the knowable (*kleśāvaraṇa* and *jñeyāvaraṇa*).

[2] They are: the world of desire (*kāmadhātu*), the world of subtle matter or the heavens of ethereal beings (*rūpadhātu*), the world of non-matter or the heavens of pure spirits (*arūpyadhātu*).

[3] In the sense that the brief aphorisms by Nāgārjuna may seem enigmatic and so need an adequate commentary, so that they can be understood in their dialectic development.

of his own treatise, hinting at the idea that would be developed throughout the whole work. He then tries to attract the attention of his own disciples by maintaining that it will deal with a great, cornerstone treatise, inasmuch as it will present the only principle of relativity in a complete, unequivocal way. Since that central idea cannot be separated, according to Mahāyāna, from Buddha's idea, Nāgārjuna, in giving praise to the very same Buddha, the master *par excellence*, alludes to the reason that induced him to compose that work: the proclamation, by Buddha, of the principle of absolute relativity of all the entities, so that the law of conditioned production is identified with emptiness (*pratītyasamutpāda* = *śūnyatā*). It is the principle according to which nothing in the universe can disappear (*nirodha*), nor can anything new be born (*utpāda*), nothing has an end (*uccheda*), nor is there anything eternal (*śāśvata*), nothing is identical to itself (*ekārtha*), nor is there something which is differentiated in itself (*nānārtha*), there is no movement, neither towards us (*āgama*), nor away from us (*nirgama*): everything is relative. The basic subject is, therefore, this principle of relativity, a principle characterized by the eight previous negations: nothing disappears, nothing appears and so on.[1]

In the initial greeting the motive for the treatise is also pointed out. It consists in the final liberation open to everybody: the 'nirvāṇa' or the beatitude of the quiescence of every plurality.

2. *The Meaning of the term 'Pratītyasamutpāda'*

One of the key terms of Buddhism that in *Nāgārjunian* thinking has a quite particular importance, is *pratītyasamutpāda*. Candrakīrti, after a careful philological analysis, presents his own interpretation, stating that the term *pratītyasamutpāda* in the Mādhyamika system means "the manifestation of entities that are separate and relative to their causes and conditions".

It is obvious that not all Buddhist thinkers accept such an interpretation of the term *pratītyasamutpāda*, and so Candrakīrti has to defend it and keep it up, against the Buddhists of the 'little vehicle' and those of the 'great vehicle', and in particular

[1]See *supra*, p. 10.

against Bhāvaviveka. Even though he is an exponent of the Mādhyamika school, he found Buddhapālita's interpretation of the aforestated term reductive and contradictory, as it is the same one that is taken up and more rigorously expounded by Candrakīrti.

Candrakīrti, on the other hand, does not contest the interpretation given by the masters of the 'little vehicle', according to whom the term *pratītyasamutpāda* means "apparition and immediate disappearance of everything". He only points out that such a meaning is badly suited to the situation, if one does not consider things in a general way, but a single thing related to another. So his interpretation turns out to be preferable, inasmuch as it is applied with equal precision to both the cases in question: things in general and each thing in relation to another.

The most dangerous objections to such an interpretation have been raised by Bhāvaviveka, the svātantrika, during his harsh polemic with Buddhapālita, the prāsaṅgika. Candrakīrti vigorously defends the doctrinal standpoint of Buddhapālita. This is the first chance in the *Prasannapadā* for Candrakīrti to show himself to be an acute controversialist.

First of all he observes how Bhāvaviveka does not quote precisely enough the other people's opinions, thus showing his own incompetence in confuting them. After having confessed that he was unable to understand the criticism Bhāvaviveka had directed at Buddhapālita concerning the philological interpretation of the term *pratītyasamutpāda* that the latter gave, Candrakīrti examines both the opinions held by Bhāvaviveka and, more generally, the principle of relativity, as the law of all phenomenal existence. He says that Bhāvaviveka gives this meaning to the term *pratītyasamutpāda*: "being relative to something else" in the sense of a conditioned judgement: "if there is this, the other appears"; "since this has appeared, the other will appear." Although the term 'dependent origin' consists of two words, it is not correct to suppose that each one refers to a different object.

Bhāvaviveka states that the expression *pratītyasamutpāda* is used without any regard for the fact that it is made up of two words. It can be taken as a conventional expression for 'relativity', just as the expression 'the ornament forest' is used to designate something completely useless, without any relation to either a forest

or an ornament. But Bhāvaviveka errs in saying this, inasmuch as Nāgārjuna confers a very precise sense to this term, in harmony with the meaning of the parts that compose it. Indeed, Nāgārjuna argues that all that seems relative to this or that is not really existent.

Besides, Bhāvaviveka explains that the term *pratītyasamutpāda* means relativity pure and simple: "This being, that arises. For example, as there is something short, there is something long." But then he acknowledges exactly the same sense to the word as had been attributed to it by other Mādhyamika: in other words, the meaning of relativity. The 'long' does not exist in an independent way, but only in that it is linked to the 'short', it is relative to the 'short', it depends on the 'short'. Even though they are opposites, both are born in the same way. In this fashion Bhāvaviveka rejected on the one hand what he accepted on the other.

The Buddha meant to place the principle of relativity in a clear light: entities are produced only in the sense that they are co-ordinated. Consequently, Nāgārjuna states that they are not produced at random nor by single cause, nor by a multiplicity of causes. He then denies that they are identical to the causes, and that they are different to their causes, or that they are at the same time partly identical and partly non-identical. By means of that method which reduces everything to the absurd (*prasaṅga*), Nāgārjuna unveils the relative character of entities of the phenomenal world. This is indeed the relative existence or the dependent origin, since nothing really new is produced.

From the Mahāyānic point of view, relative existence is a condition in which nothing disappears, nor does anything new appear as there is no movement in it. It is a condition characterized by the eight negations mentioned before. So the entire treatise sets out to show that the condition of interdependence or the principle of relativity does not allow for anything in the universe to disappear, nor for anything new to appear.

The law of conditioned production, being the central law of all existence, can be characterized by an infinite number of finite characteristics, but only eight have been chosen, as they predominate in the sense that they have provided points for debate. That law is also called quiescence or the levelling out of every plurality (*nirvāṇa*), since if it is understood in a critical

way, there is no longer any differentiation of existence for the philosopher, to which he can apply our words and concepts. It seems so clear how Nāgārjuna ends by saying that *saṃsāra* is the same as *nirvāṇa*, and the *pratītyasamutpāda* is the same as *śūnyatā*.

In all this no undifferentiated thoughts or sensations are born, there is no subject or object of knowledge, consequently there is no change like birth, old age and death: there is only an eternal undifferentiated beatitude.

Since the principle of dependent origin—as it has been defined here to mean the relativity of existence—is the direct object of the present instruction, it is alluded to in the dedication verses as to the object of Buddha's teachings: "It is the perfect Buddha, the first of all masters, that I greet; he has proclaimed the principle of conditioned production (*pratītyasamutpāda*) which is the quiescence of every plurality. There nothing disappears, nor does anything appear, nothing has an end, nor is there anything eternal, nothing is identical to itself, nor is there anything differentiated, nothing moves in one direction or another."[1]

The Buddha alone has righteously taught the doctrine of conditioned production, since he conceived it as it has now been described. The master Nāgārjuna, having understood that all the diverging doctrines are nothing more than silly discourses in comparison to Buddha's teachings, expresses his own deep sentiment of devotion towards the Buddha by praising him and naming him "the first of all the masters".

3. *The Negation of the Existence of Something that is Born from Itself*

The first of the four conditions (*pratyaya*)[2] that are the object of Nāgārjuna's confutation in the first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' is the cause-condition (*hetu*).

Candrakīrti dedicates several pages of his *Prasannapadā* to commenting on such an important point in the thought of the Mādhyamika school and he starts to examine whether something that is born from itself actually does exist. He says that causation, which in other philosophical systems is imagined of as a real pro-

[1]Dedication to the Buddha at the beginning of the *MMK* by Nāgārjuna.
[2]See *supra*, pp. 13-5.

duction, either appears as a new manifestation of the same substance that continues, or as an influence of distinct factors, or as a result of both (that is, of a substance that continues and of distinct factors), or as a chance procedure, with no regularity whatsoever.

Nāgārjuna does not believe that any of these theories holds true: "Never has any being born from itself or from non-self, or from both or without cause existed."[1]

To these words one could object that an undesirable consequence (*prasaṅga*)[2] will follow, when negation is highlighted and it is stated that entities are not born from the self. Will it perhaps turn out that they are born from some sort of non-self, that is, from factors that are separate from them? The answer is no, since a simple negation only is expressed, without any implicit statement contrary to it.

The argument against the origin of something from itself, that is, against the pre-existence of the effect in its material cause, has to be constructed by following the same yardsticks as illustrated by Candrakīrti in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, where he states that no real advantage will be gained if something that already exists is born again. If something really exists, its repeated birth is an absurdity. Candrakīrti cites this with regard to the master Buddhapālita, according to whom an entity is not born from itself, as such an origin would have no purpose, and it would bring about the absurd consequence that everything is born or is being born eternally. Indeed, if things do exist, there is no need to produce them all over again, and to suppose that something that exists can once again be produced, means that it is never non-nascent: it is eternally being born.

This comment of Buddhapālita on the first verse of Nāgārjuna is a typical example of the *prāsaṅgika* method of reducing all their adversaries' statements to the level of absurdity. According to Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti, only in this way does one avoid giving in to the temptations of badly grasping the emptiness and giving it a positive value, that is, treating it in the same way

[1]*MMK*, I, 1.

[2]*Prasaṅga*, etymologically means 'occasion'. Later the term was used by Buddhapālita to express the Mādhyamika method of reducing everything to the level of absurdity.

as other opinions or particular theories. This is the authentic teaching of Nāgārjuna and the true importance of his dialectic.[1]

4. *The Validity of the 'Prāsaṅgika' Method Reaffirmed by Candrakīrti in the Defence of Buddhapālita against Bhāvaviveka*

After having quoted Buddhapālita's comment on Nāgārjuna's maxim, according to which things are not born from their own self, Candrakīrti reaffirms the validity of the method *reductio ad absurdum* or *deductio ad absurdum* (*prasaṅga vākya*). That method, which was the only one allowed by Buddhapālita, had been fiercely attacked by Bhāvaviveka, who held it to be too restrictive and not able to capture all the potential included in Nāgārjuna's words.

Candrakīrti defends Buddhapālita's position from a three-pronged attack mounted against him by Bhāvaviveka, and he does it in a meticulous and convincing way. Bhāvaviveka had in fact argued that Buddhapālita's comment missed the target in that:

(1) it has neither an independent reason nor an example,
(2) it leaves the objections without an answer,
(3) it is purely and simply a *deductio ad absurdum*, and consequently, in contrast to the negation expressed, both a counter-thesis and a counter-reason will implicitly emerge. It will turn out that the entities are produced from something essentially separate from them.

Candrakīrti sees all of Bhāvaviveka's attack on Buddhapālita as ill-founded. As far as the first objection is concerned that Buddhapālita has no independent reason or any example, the objection does not seem fitting. The system opposed to the Mādhyamika, the Sāṃkhya, that defends the identity of cause and effect, is asked to explain what the cause is needed for in relation to something that already exists. Stating that the cause is 'the self', the followers of Sāṃkhya seem to assert that 'the same self' is once again produced. The supporters of the 'Middle Way' do not understand the sense of a new production of what

[1]Pezzali, *Mahāyāna*, pp. 137-8.

already exists. Further to that, in such an assertion the Mādhyamika philosophers see the danger of a regression to the infinite. Indeed, the recently produced thing will be repeatedly produced for all the time that it exists and so on for infinity.

In reality the followers of Sāṃkhya had no intention of stating that an existent thing is once again produced, nor do they admit an infinite series of self-productions. It, therefore, turns out that their theory of a substantial identity between cause and effect is absurd, and thus expressed, goes against their own intentions.

Bhāvaviveka, however, argues that if the Sāṃkhya is only attacked from that aspect, it will not surrender easily. The introduction of another reason is thus necessary, together with another example, to make the Mādhyamika critique against the Sāṃkhya more effective.

Buddhapālita discovered a self-contradiction in the argument advanced by the followers of Sāṃkhya and in spite of that they continue their mistakes. They will not be reduced to silence even with the new arguments and new examples, as their obstinacy is the fruit of their impudence. It is not worthwhile carrying on a dispute with fools. By not insisting, Buddhapālita acted wisely.

To the contrary, Bhāvaviveka showed a strong inclination towards syllogistic reasoning. He would like to apply the syllogistic scheme to his adversaries' erroneous position. But according to the Mādhyamika's dialectic method there is never any need of an independent argument. This Mādhyamika method consists in producing a counter-thesis and then in weighing up the two contrasting opinions, without accepting either one of them. Āryadeva had said: "If I do not admit the reality of a thing, nor its non-reality, nor both of them at the same time, then they will need much time to confute myself."[1]

In Nāgārjuna's work, the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, "the exterminator of dissent", the Mādhyamika position is found to be expressed in an analogous way, that is, it is said that if one has some kind of thesis, it is without doubt the victim of these contradictions. But if one has no thesis whatsoever, then one is not subject to any

[1]*Catuḥśataka*, XVI, 25.

contradiction. If one could perceive something with direct perception, one would consequently find oneself admitting or denying things; but if one perceives nothing at all, then the position of who does not perceive is incontrovertible.[1]

As the Mādhyamika philosopher is not obliged to have his own argument in which to confide completely, why does Bhāvaviveka expect Buddhapālita to confute the Sāṃkhya by means of an independent argument, like the one he had presented, that is, "the mind and the sense faculties are not necessarily identical to their causes?" Indeed, the Sāṃkhya philosophers had asked Buddhapālita what the sense of his argument actually was.[2] Was he denying the identification between cause and effect, in that an effect is really a new manifestation of the same substance or was he denying the very same material identity?

According to the first hypothesis, Buddhapālita is supposed to have supported an opinion on which they agreed (they admitted that the effect is a new manifestation of a substance that continues). According to the second hypothesis, on the other hand, Buddhapālita seemed to contradict himself, as he supported the non-duality, and he should consequently have admitted that every effect necessarily pre-exists in its own cause.

Bhāvaviveka expected Buddhapālita to have replied to the Sāṃkhya's objections. But this was impossible for a Mādhyamika, who believes in no logical criterion and thus Buddhapālita could not produce the argument suggested by Bhāvaviveka.[3]

The Sāṃkhya could, in fact, have declared the argument to be meaningless, as it had never doubted it, or self-contradictory, as it really implied the identity of cause and effect. Thus, seeing that his adversaries' objections were absolutely out of place, it was not opportune for Buddhapālita to confute them.

One can even suppose, says Candrakīrti, that Bhāvaviveka thought that Buddhapālita was unable to demonstrate what he himself was putting forward, that is, that there is no real cause beyond the same substance, since the Mādhyamika school did not acknowledge the validity of any reason, nor of any thesis, any

1Cf. Gnoli, *Stanzas*, p. 147, verses 29-30.

2See *supra*, p. 29.

3I.e., that the mind and the sense faculties are not necessarily identical to their cause.

example, nor did he present any independent argument. In addition, by accusing the adversary of having contradicted himself as Buddhapālita had done, one could have had to take up a position on an argument that, according to his own opinion, is free from those errors of logic to which a thesis, a reason and an example are subject to. But the master Buddhapālita brought forth no independent reasons, nor examples nor did he show himself able to avoid the errors of logic highlighted by the Sāṃkhya. Thus the accusation of not having proved anything with his *deductio ad absurdum* seems to be valid.

And yet in reality it is false, according to Candrakīrti, for the following reasons. When somebody makes an assertion he wishes to convince others to accept his own point of view. To this purpose, he demonstrates to his interlocutor the validity of that very reasoning by which he reached the right conclusion.

In fact, it is a general rule that the adversary will be eventually persuaded if he agrees with the argument that the interlocutor put forward to prove his own theory. But the case of the Mādhyamika philosopher is completely different. He supports no theory in order to persuade his adversary; he has no reason or examples of which he himself is convinced. He puts forward his own thesis and puts some effort into demonstrating it only as long as it runs parallel to his adversary's one and is able in that way to demolish the latter's argument.

The Mādhyamika philosopher thus presents some thesis that cannot be proven. He is even in conflict with himself and certainly cannot convince the adversary of his imaginary thesis.[1]

But can there be a more eloquent confutation than the demonstration that the adversary is not able to prove his own theory? Is it really necessary to put forward new arguments (*anumānabādha*)?

Nevertheless, if Bhāvaviveka insists on saying that this must be done and he expects the contradiction present in the principle of the adversary to be unveiled by an independent argument, one can state that Buddhapālita had done it when he said that

[1]Several times Nāgārjuna reaffirmed that he sets forth no positive statement, not even a statement that all things are empty. Consequently, one cannot mention any assertion that is his statement, and so there is no sense in speaking of mistakes which derive from it.

entities are not born from themselves, since that origin would serve no purpose. Indeed, if something already exists in its own individual reality, there is no need for it to be produced again. This sentence indicates the example, that is, an analogous case admitted by the adversary, in which both the reason and the predicate coexist at the same time, for example, an existent jar. The reason is indicated by the words "it exists in its own individual reality", and the predicate is indicated by the words "because such an origin would serve no purpose".

The following regular syllogism (*parārthānumāna*)[1] is the result:

Thesis or statement (*pratijñā*): an entity does not require a second production,
Reason or cause (*hetu*): because it exists,
Major premiss or universal proposition (*udāharaṇa*): all that exists does not require itself to be produced once again,
Example or application of the universal principle (*upanaya*): just like a jar,
Conclusion (*nigamana*): hence an entity does not require a second production.

A jar in its potential condition in a block of clay is an example by contrast, since it is necessary for it to be really produced. But if we mean a jar that already exists, then such a jar cannot be produced again. The reason or cause, that is the middle term of Buddhapālita's syllogism, is the fact of the single and immediate existence, that makes the second origin of something that already exists impossible.

Buddhapālita had really singled out a contradiction in the argument put forward by the leaders of the Sāṃkhya, and he did it by means of his own independent argument. How can he, therefore, be accused of not having an independent reason nor an example? Buddhapālita pointed out the contradictions present in the theory of causality held by the Sāṃkhya not only through a *deductio ad absurdum*, but also through an independent argument. So it is not correct to hold that he had not replied to the accusations directed at him by the Sāṃkhya. Bhāvaviveka's objection is absolutely out of place and quite gratuitous.

[1] I.e., made up of five sentences that constitute: the thesis, the cause, the major premiss, the example and the conclusion.

Bhāvaviveka's third objection against Buddhapālita is that the refusal of the theory of causality held by the Sāṃkhya, by a pure and simple *deductio ad absurdum*, implies the acceptance of the opposite theory, that is, that cause and effect represent two different substances.

This is not correct, because new criticism will be again advanced against the contrary theory by the followers of the Sāṃkhya and not by the Mādhyamikas, since the Mādhyamikas have no opinion of their own and cannot thus be accused of contradicting their own principles.

Nor does Buddhapālita, a faithful follower of Nāgārjuna's method, declare anything in a careless way, which could offer the adversary a chance to criticize him, because when a philosopher, that denies the reality of the single object, shows the conception of their reality to be absurd, it is evident that he cannot be accused of holding the opposite of this deduction.[1] Indeed, the only result of the deduction is to refute the adversary's theory. The acceptance of the contrary theory as a result is not at all implicit.

Even Nāgārjuna, when he fought opposite opinions, often appealed to the *deductio ad absurdum*, without ever admitting the positive counter-argument.[2]

With regard to this, Bhāvaviveka notices that Nāgārjuna's sentences contain intentions which are so deep as to be interpreted in various ways and give birth to different syllogistic formulations.

Without any doubt Buddhapālita's comment, which contains no syllogistic formulation, should not be held to be the only and 'normative' interpretation of Nāgārjuna's thought. But if

[1]Candrakīrti says that words cannot deprive us of freedom. They have the power of expressing something, but they are always controlled by the speaker's intention.

[2]For example: "The space does not exist before the character of the space. If the space existed before the character, it would consequently be empty of character" (*MMK*, V, 1). "If matter exists without a cause of matter, it would consequently be empty of cause. But there is nowhere a thing without a cause" (*MMK*, IV, 2). That does not at all imply that Nāgārjuna admitted the existence of the caused matter. One more example: "The nirvāṇa however, is not a being because, if it were, it should consequently be characterized by old age and death. There is no being, in fact, without old age and death" (*MMK*, XXV, 4).

Bhāvaviveka insists the commentators to articulate their syllogistic formulations implied in the aphorisms in a particular way, then Candrakīrti thinks that this is not an absolute law. For example, Nāgārjuna drew up a commentary on his own dialectic work, "The exterminator of dissent", without indulging in any syllogistic formulation whatsoever. The fact is that Bhāvaviveka, according to Candrakīrti, only wants to show off his dialectic ability and for this reason he willingly uses independent syllogistic arguments. To such a logician, the Mādhyamika method is only a great hindrance.

Carried along by the imminence of the polemic, Candrakīrti, after having defended Buddhapālita's position concerning the validity of his *reductio ad absurdum* from the objections directed at him by Bhāvaviveka, now turns to attack the very same Bhāvaviveka. Candrakīrti critically examines the argument that the Svātantrika master had composed and proposed as the most effective in demolishing the theory of causality held by the Sāṃkhya. It is the following syllogism:

Thesis (*pratijñā*): the mental phenomena from the point of view of the transcendental reality are not new productions of the same substance,

Reason (*hetu*): because they exist,

Example (*upanaya*): just as the spiritual and conscious principle (*puruṣa*) of the Sāṃkhya, which is an eternal and unchangeable entity:

The major premiss (*udāharaṇa*): all that already exists is not a new self-production.

Bhāvaviveka answers Candrakīrti who asks him about the meaning of the parenthesis "from the point of view of the transcendental reality", that, when one takes up a position on phenomenal reality, the origin of mental phenomena cannot be denied. Otherwise the contrast acknowledged by the Mādhyamikas between the absolute thing in itself and phenomenal reality would turn out not to exist.

According to Candrakīrti, this is not correct, because the

identity of cause and effect is denied even from a phenomenal point of view.[1]

In the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' Nāgārjuna states: "All that is born dependent on something else, is indeed not identical with this thing, nor is it on the other hand different from it. So this thing is neither annihilated nor eternal."[2] If Bhāvaviveka were to state that the restriction "from the point of view of the transcendental reality" had been introduced in the said syllogism concerning the opinion held by the adversary, one can answer that such a method is wrong, because the Mādhyamika system does not allow for such an opinion, not even from the point of view of the phenomenal reality. To the non-Buddhist the direct understanding of the division between both realities, the superior one and the phenomenal one, is absolutely lacking. So it is much better to refuse them from both these points of view. That will be most advantageous. The restriction introduced by Bhāvaviveka is thus out of place, even if it was done in order to tell the difference between the author's opinion and the adversary's, and from the ideas of the laymen.

As far as the laymen are concerned, they do not understand what self-origin means and so the restriction turns out to be useless for them. The laymen simply admit that an effect is produced by a cause and do not consider whether or not the effect is identical with the cause or not.

Nāgārjuna demonstrated the same thing, as if to say that we must make use of the idea of causality everyday without any hope of explaining it metaphysically. Thus, it is clear that the restriction is senseless.

One can, however, come to an agreement and acknowledge that the restriction in question could have been introduced to declare that phenomenal causality is not denied. In spite of

[1]This is confirmed by the following words of the Buddha: "This sprout, which springs from a seed, is not produced from itself, nor from the 'non-self', nor from both of them, nor without a cause. It is not produced from God (*Īśvara*), nor from time, nor from the atoms, nor from original matter (*prakṛti*), nor from nature (*svabhāva*). The sprout does not belong to the seed, nor is the seed identical with the sprout, nor is it non-identical. It is a manifestation of that unique reality (*dharmatā*), that cannot be indicated as either an annihilation or as one of the eternal principles."

[2]*MMK*, XVIII, 10.

that, Bhāvaviveka's syllogism is thus formally insufficient, since its example (*upanaya*) "the spiritual and conscious principle" acknowledged by the Sāṃkhya and its reason (*hetu*) "the existence of mental phenomena" are definitely both unreal. One could then either have the logical error of an imperfect thesis (*pratijñā*), since it refers to something, that is, to mental phenomena, that the very author of the syllogism, as a Mādhyamika, does not accept as being real or the logical error of an imperfect reason (*hetu*), as the existence or the reality of mental phenomena will be referred to as something equally unreal.

As a Mādhyamika, Bhāvaviveka does not acknowledge the transcendental reality of separate mental phenomena, but at the same time he composes a syllogism about this very thing that does not exist.

If he says that that is of no importance, since the phenomenal reality of the sense of sight, hearing, etc. is acknowledged, then what do the words "from the transcendental point of view" indicate?

According to Bhāvaviveka the restriction is only introduced with the aim of specifying the kind of causality that is denied. Candrakīrti maintains that he should have expressed himself otherwise in that case, and he should have said that the presumed phenomenal reality of the sense faculties is not a transcendental reality. And even supposing that Bhāvaviveka had expressed himself correctly, he would nevertheless not have escaped the logical error of an imperfect thesis (*pratijñā*).[1]

Hence the argument is wrong either from its author's point of view, for whom the separate mental phenomena are not real, or from the point of view of those to whom it is directed, as they do not admit any difference between phenomenal reality and the absolute one.

Candrakīrti shows how Bhāvaviveka is later obliged to admit the condemnation of the logic, when he takes into consideration the following syllogism proposed by a follower of the Hīnayāna:

[1]Indeed such a thesis would have assigned something to empirical sensations that was completely unknown to the adversary, insofar as for the Sāṃkhya all sensations are absolutely real and there is no nominal or empirical reality at all.

Thesis (*pratijñā*): the cause and the conditions that produce the mental phenomena really exist,
Reason (*hetu*): because that was said by the Buddha:
Major premiss (*udāharaṇa*): everything that has been proclaimed by the Buddha is true,
Example (*upanaya*): like the statement that nirvāṇa is the final quiescence.

Bhāvaviveka criticizes that syllogism, asking what sense is given to the word 'cause' and if the Buddha had spoken from a phenomenal point of view or from a transcendental one. If it is understood in the phenomenal sense, reason (*hetu*) "because this has been said by Buddha" has no definitive reality for the very same Buddha.

Instead, supposing that it is understood in the sense of something transcendentally real, then one must remember Nāgārjuna's words: "Since no entity, neither existent, or non-existent, nor existent and non-existent, is produced, there can be no cause to produce it."[1]

By adopting this line of argumentation as regards the follower of the 'little vehicle', the very same Bhāvaviveka acknowledged the unreality of every reason (*hetu*) from the Mādhyamika point of view.[2]

Moreover, the reason for the syllogism put forward by Bhāvaviveka "because they (the mental phenomena) exist" is uncertain from the adversary's point of view. The syllogism in question is turned against the Sāṃkhya, that admits a double kind of existence: the eternal and unchangeable existence of the spiritual and conscious principle (*puruṣa*) and the changing existence of nature or matter (*prakṛti*). Hence it is uncertain whether the words "because they already exist" means that mental pheno-

[1]*MMK* I, 7. The meaning of this stanza by Nāgārjuna is as follows: Since causation is excluded from things, both real and unreal, partly real and unreal, there is nothing similar to a really efficient cause. So, from the transcendental point of view there is absolutely no efficient causality. Every cause that can be adduced will either be definitely unreal or contradictory.

[2]In that way all the logical demonstrations are shattered, since in all the syllogisms of that kind reasons are alleged which, according to the adversary, are founded on the real fact, while according to the Mādhyamika philosopher they are all definitely unreal.

mena eternally exist just as the spiritual and conscious principle exists, or whether they refer to that kind of origin that is exemplified by the origin of the jar or of every other physical existence in general, an origin that represents the changing of a permanent substance since, according to Sāṃkhya, the mental changes are in themselves physical variations.[1]

At this point one could argue that such an argumentation by the Mādhyamikas is then exposed to the same criticism that they themselves had turned towards their adversaries' arguments. All the Mādhyamika's arguments will be erroneous, because the reasons adduced are either non-entities or they represent something belonging to a non-entity. When both the parties are blameworthy of the same error, one cannot accuse just one of them. And so all their attack against the logic would turn out to be unfounded.

This objection can only regard those who, although being Mādhyamika philosophers, like Bhāvaviveka, nonetheless largely turn to arguments (*svatantra-anumāna*). The Mādhyamikas do not appeal to any direct demonstrations by means of syllogisms.[2]

It can be supposed that someone should state "the eye perceives external objects." He will then be confuted by the principles he himself had admitted, since he argues that the eye lacks the capacity of introspection which, in his opinion, is invariably concomitant with the capacity for grasping external objects. The following counter-argument can be opposed to him:

Major premiss: wherever introspection is absent, there the cognition of external objects is also absent,
Example: as in physical objects, bowls, sandals, jars etc.;

[1]One could object that the example given, that is, that the material identity in physical objects like jars etc. is a *petitio principii* and thus the argument is not only uncertain, but also erroneous. Things, however, do not stand like that, because the argument is not established according to the Mādhyamika point of view, but according to the Sāṃkhya one, that holds that mental phenomena have a double nature: they are physical in themselves and are at the same time the reflection of the eternal and unchanging spiritual principle.

[2]The arguments of the Mādhyamikas can only result in the refusal of the adversaries' principles: to the Mādhyamikas those arguments are not valid in themselves.

Minor premiss: the eye lacks introspective capacity, it is a physical object,
Conclusion: it cannot therefore know external objects.

So, the perception of an external object, like a patch of green colour, is in conflict with the fact that the eye itself is without self-perception. This contradiction present in the adversary's argument is brought to light by the preceding counter-argument, which is valid from the very same adversary's point of view. That only is allowed to be deduced from the syllogism put forward by Candrakīrti. How can one state that such a deduction contain the same imperfection found in the adversary's argument?

Bhāvaviveka added that certainly for the Mādhyamikas all the single facts have no reality, but in spite of that, he holds a discussion to be possible even when an argument is debated on the basis of a principle admitted only by one of the contending parties.

Candrakīrti replies that this must be done on the basis of the principles admitted by the very same Mādhyamikas and not on the basis of the principles admitted by their adversaries. On the other hand, that happens in everyday life. Indeed, in common life, two contending parties often nominate someone as their judge and, according to his verdict, who is right and who is wrong is decided. But it sometimes happens that the same contender declares he has won or lost. But it is not up to the adversary to decide as to who is right and who is wrong. What holds good in common life is equally correct in the logic, because the logic is exclusively concerned with an examination of those principles that are at the basis of the actions of common life.

It is exactly for this reason that some logicians have stated that an argument cannot be destroyed on the basis of principles admitted by the adversary, because they are the same principles that one intends to refuse.

To the contrary, Diṅnāga[1] argues that a demonstration or a confutation is valid, provided that the argumentation is conducted on principles admitted by either party. If they are only admitted by one party, then that argumentation is inconclusive. He, too, is however obliged to keep in due account the method

[1]See *supra*, pp. 19-20.

that prevails in common life, and he thus admits the validity of arguments that spring from principles admitted only by one party.

Indeed, Diṅnāga admits that if the discussion concerns religious arguments, then the *sūtra* chosen by the adversary cannot be refuted on the basis of other *sūtra*, chosen by both parties. Then for what concerns individual judgements (*svārthānumāna*), which take place in the conscience of every man, they are exclusively determined by what people hold to be fair, and not by what the two parties may agree upon.

Therefore, the point of view of rigorous logic is not to set itself any goal. The Buddhas were of great help to their converted followers, who were not experts in the science of logic, turning to arguments which were suitable for the occasion.

5. *The Negation of the Existence of Something that is Born from the 'Non-self'*

After the very long digression dedicated to reaffirming the validity of the *prāsaṅgika* method in the controversy with Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti resumes his commentary by analyzing the second point of Nāgārjuna's statement, according to which something born from the 'non-self' does not exist and he reminds us how the entities cannot be born from something different from them, inasmuch as for the Mādhyamikas the different does not exist. If the entities do not pre-exist in something else, they cannot be produced by this something else. In addition, the impossibility of a substantial interruption between cause and effect can likewise be demonstrated by following the yardsticks formulated by Candrakīrti in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, where it is said that if a thing were really another with respect to the causes, then the deep obscurity would be produced by the light.[1] And truthfully everything would be produced by any other thing whatsoever, since the changeability is the same both in the causes and in the noncauses.

Commenting on this point Buddhapālita says that the entities cannot be born from something that is essentially different

[1] In the sense that any thing can produce any other thing whatsoever and even its opposite, like light as regards obscurity.

from them, insofar as it would then turn out that everything is born from any other thing whatsoever.

Bhāvaviveka, however, criticizes that explanation—judging it to be absurd—and he shows how Buddhapālita's comment destroys itself, since: (i) it is a pure and simple *deductio ad absurdum*; (ii) it is in disagreement with the position that had previously been demonstrated. Indeed, assuming the opposite of reason and predicate, we have the following argument: since everything must be born from something and the origin from the 'non-self' is rejected, the entities must thus either be born from themselves or from a combination of 'self' and 'non-self', or without a cause, otherwise everything would really be born from any other thing whatsoever.

Candrakīrti, on the other hand, argues that it has nothing to do with an absurd explanation insofar as the *deductio ad absurdum* is an effective demonstration. Then regarding the accusation according to which Buddhapālita, confuting the principle of his adversary, had indirectly invalidated his own previously demonstrated position, such an accusation seems to be senseless to him. Candrakīrti does not confute it, as he had already done so when he presented what the Mādhyamika method consisted of.[1]

6. *The Negation of the Existence of Something that is Born from the 'Self' and the 'Non-self'*

Candrakīrti then critically examines the third point of Nāgārjuna's statement, according to which nothing which is produced from the 'self' and the 'non-self' exists. Entities are not born from both (the 'self' and the 'non-self'), that is from a substance that remains and from separate factors, since incoherence, present in each one of these hypotheses separately, is consequently also attributed to their combination. Nor can one think that these two causes can act alternatively, and not simultaneously, because, if they are not able to produce something separately, they are not even able to produce something alternatively either. Later on, in the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' it is stated that the world should

[1]See *supra*, pp. 35-36.

be produced from both of them, that is from the 'self' and the 'non-self', if it were produced from each one of those separately.[1]

But it has already been proved that the 'self' and the 'non-self', each one on its own account, are not able to produce something. The result is that from the 'self' and the 'non-self' together nothing can be born.

7. *The Negation of the Existence of Something that is Born Without a Cause*

The fourth and final statement by Nāgārjuna concerns the possibility or impossibility of the existence of something that is born without a cause. Indeed, all the entities of this world cannot be born without a cause. The inconsistencies that would result if one did not accept that hypothesis are signalled by Nāgārjuna later on.[2]

In his *Madhyamakāvatāra* Candrakīrti emphasized those inconsistencies saying that in a universe without causes nothing would be perceived: it would be similar to colour and smell of a lotus that grows in the sky.[3]

In his commentary Buddhapālita observes how the entities cannot even be born without a cause, because otherwise everything would be possible at any time in any place.

Bhāvaviveka attacks Buddhapālita also in this case, as it again amounts to a pure and simple *deductio ad absurdum* according to him, and it can be overturned, if the sense of the argument is revealed by assuming the opposite of reason and predicate.[4]

Candrakīrti does not agree with Bhāvaviveka, but does not

[1] *MMK*, XII, 9.

[2] *MMK*, VIII, 4: "Without motive, neither an effect nor a cause is given and without these, neither an activity, nor an agent nor an instrument exists."

[3] Something which is just as absurd as the son of a sterile woman or the horn of a hare.

[4] Bhāvaviveka replies to Buddhapālita, who states that the entities are not without a cause, as otherwise everything would appear at any time in any place, that the entities must have a cause, since every thing is born in a definite time and in a precise place, and because, as experience shows, efficient causes produce new results. So Buddhapālita's commentary on this point is not correct, because it contains the same erroneous concept present in the previous parts of the work.

waste time in showing how that criticism misses its target, as it has already been done previously.[1]

8. *Reply to Some Objections Concerning the Phenomenal World*

Having ended the commentary on the first verse of the first chapter of Nāgārjuna's fundamental work,[2] Candrakīrti answers some objections relating to the content of the verse. First of all, he denies wanting to introduce some sort of superior cause in place of the common concept of causality.[3]

Candrakīrti reminds us that among the reasons that induced Nāgārjuna to compose his work, one was to demonstrate the difference between the conventional and the real sense of Buddha's words, when these are referred to the law of conditioned production. That work, in fact, was composed both for those who did not have any perfect knowledge of the intention contained in Buddha's expressions and so started having doubts about whether a particular expression is referred to the absolute truth or whether it gets further away from it with a special intention, and also for those who confuse a metaphorical expression for real intention due to their slowness of mind.

Some people advance the following objection: how is it possible to sustain a moral law in an unreal world, as Nāgārjuna had composed his celebrated fundamental treatise with the aim of proving that there is no real cause and that the plurality of the vital elements is an illusion, and considering that what is an illusion does not really exist, one logically concludes that evil actions do not exist at all. But if evil actions do not exist, then there are no unhappy existences, nor are virtuous actions possible,

[1]See *supra*, p. 35, where Candrakīrti reaffirmed the *deductio ad absurdum* as the only valid method of knowledge.

[2]*MMK*, I, 1: "Never has any being born from itself, from another, from both or without cause existed."

[3]It could even be supposed that the Mādhyamika criticism of the usual notion of causality intended to introduce God or similar superior causes. But even that turns out to be impossible, as God has to be included in one of the three alternatives discussed, given the Mādhyamika position with regard to his essence. Either God is immanent in the world or he transcends it or he is both things together, that is, at the same time immanent and transcendent. There is thus no causality in the final analysis, while the dependent origin (*pratītyasamutpāda*) with its eight negations is proven.

without which no happy existence is possible. Without the happy and unhappy existences there is no saṃsāric cycle (*saṃsāra*),[1] and so all the efforts for a better life are absolutely fruitless.[2]

In reality, says Candrakīrti, the Mādhyamika system maintains that existence is an illusion only as an antidote against the obstinate belief of men in the reality of this world, and he affirms the relative truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) of the latter. But the saints (*ārya*) have no need of it: they have reached intuitive knowledge (*prajñāpāramitā*) and do not hold onto any plurality.[3] When a man has understood the multiple illusion of all the separate entities, no other moral law exists for him, for he is beyond it.[4]

The Buddha, in the *Ratnakūṭasūtra*, "the speech of the multitude of jewels,"[5] turning to his own disciple Kāśyapa, says that if one is looking for conscience, one cannot find it. And what cannot be found, cannot be perceived; what cannot be perceived is not past, future nor present.[6] What is not past, future nor present has no separate reality, and what has no reality has no cause. What has not been caused, cannot disappear. The layman comes to wrongful conclusions from all that, and by not understanding the illusory nature of the separate elements, he obstinately argues that the contingent entities have their own reality. Influenced by such a belief in the reality of separate things, he does the action (*karman*), and consequently passes onto this phenomenal world.[7] As long as man is prey to such confusion, he is not able to reach nirvāṇa.[8]

1Or phenomenal world.

2The validity of the way the Buddha indicated for salvation is, therefore, denied.

3L. de La Vallée Poussin in his translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva, notes on page 110: "The ordinary man is the one who perceives things with the normal means of knowledge and believes them to really exist; the 'yogin' is the one who perceives things with the normal means of knowledge and recognizes them to be illusions. The buddhas by looking at things have no notion of them, because these do not exist from the point of view of absolute truth. The knowledge of a buddha is a non-knowledge."

4Then how can there be moral actions or a phenomenal life for him? He will never pose himself the problem of whether an entity exists or not.

5It is a collection of *sūtra* of the Mahāyāna.

6It does not exist in the three tenses.

7I.e., he accumulates *karman* by means of fruitful actions, which he will then have to use up in future lives.

8The nirvāṇa is a cessation, absolute calm: the flame which extinguishes itself due to a lack of fuel.

Though the reality of these separate entities is an illusion, they can nevertheless either produce moral corruption or moral purification, just like the magical apparition of a splendid woman inspires passion to those who have not understood her nature, and an image evoked by the Buddha can be the cause of moral purification for those who have practised virtue.

9. *The Controversy with the Buddhist Logicians*

At this point Candrakīrti has to defend the Mādhyamika school's thought against the criticism levelled against it by the thinkers of the other Mahāyānic school, the Vijñānavādins. They had considerably deepened the study of logic to the extent that with Diṅnāga and his disciples a right and proper school of Buddhist logic had been set up.[1] Candrakīrti, just as Nāgārjuna, contests the validity of the logic and demonstrates its uselessness.

Some critics argue that to state in absolute terms that the separate entities are not caused, as the Mādhyamikas do, may lead to two possible admissions. The first is that such a statement is based on an argument, and thus one is obliged to answer the following questions: how many sources of knowledge are there? What is their essence? What is their reach? What is their origin? Did these sources rise from themselves or from something alien, or from both of them or from nothing?

The second possible admission is that such a statement is not based on an argument, and so it must be refuted, insofar as the cognition of an object depends on the method by which it is known. If something is not yet known, it can only be known by using appropriate methods. If it is argued that such methods do not exist, there will be no cognition whatsoever. Then how can one argue that separate entities are not caused? The same motive which allows some to state that nothing is caused will allow those who oppose such a thesis to state the contrary, that is that each single thing exists. Just as it can be stated that all the elements of existence are without a cause, it can likewise be stated that everything which exists has a cause.[2] But it is possible

[1]See *supra*, pp. 19-20.

[2]Without a yardstick of truth to give validity to the assertion, all the assertions become possible, as they are expressed without evidence.

that such a statement is merely sophistic and does not expect to convince the adversary of a thesis, which is not even believed by proposers.

Candrakīrti replies that all that is true for those who make statements on the plane of the absolute truth (*paramārthasatya*). But the Mādhyamikas deny the very same possibility of problematic judgements on the plane of the absolute truth, and so there is no sense in speaking of corresponding statements (perhaps corresponding to the other inexistent member of the relation?). It would be like the length and the brevity of something inexistent, for example, a donkey's horn.

If the Mādhyamikas do not admit any element's existence, where are the entities for whose reality one would imagine the existence of sources of right knowledge? And how are their number, their essence and their respective objects established? How does one decide if they have an origin from themselves, or from the 'non-self', or from both, or without a cause? The Mādhyamikas are not at all obliged to reply to those questions.

And if the logicians argue that it is a decisive statement saying that the entities do not rise from themselves, nor from something different, nor from both, nor by chance, then they are behaving just like laymen, who try to understand the statement in question according to arguments familiar to them. But it is not so for the saints (*ārya*), who are able to perceive absolute reality by intuition.[1]

So the logicians can ask whether, according to the Mādhyamikas, the saints believe in some argument or not? The answer is: who is able to say so? Faced with absolute reality the saints remain in silence.[2]

But if the saints do not speak, how can they lead lay-people to the idea of absolute reality?

It is quite evident that the saints, involved in a conversation with lay-people, turn to arguments that are familiar to them, admitting them temporarily and only in order to instruct.

1Only intuitive knowledge (*apratyakṣajñāna*) is the perfection of knowledge (*prajñāpāramitā*), while the discursive knowledge (*prapañcajñāna*) is only of the phenomenal plane.

2The Buddha himself, to the question: "if the world has an end," remained silent, he did not pronounce himself, because it concerns phenomenal grounds, false from the absolute point of view.

Candrakīrti then pauses to examine critically other doctrines of the Buddhist school of logic, such as the notion of the instant point (*kṣaṇa*) that substitutes the concept of substance, and the definition that the school proposes for the perception of senses.

10. *The Confutation of the four Conditions*

A. The four Conditions are Non-Causes

After having replied to the adversaries' criticisms regarding the content of the first stanza, Candrakīrti quickly proceeds to comment on the other thirteen stanzas of the first chapter of Nāgārjuna's work. And he often does it when answering the objections from the followers of the Hīnayāna, who although agreeing with the belief that entities cannot rise up from themselves,[1] that they cannot rise up from a pre-existent substance or from separate factors,[2] or that they exist by chance, with no causal connection,[3] do not agree with the belief that not even entities caused by something separate from them exist, insofar as the Buddha pointed out that the existent entities have causes which produce them, and that such causes are essentially different from the produced entity.

The Hīnayāna followers state that there can be four conditions (*pratyaya*) of every entity produced:

(a) the cause-condition (*hetu-pratyaya*),
(b) the basic-condition (*ālambana-pratyaya*),
(c) the antecedent-condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*),
(d) the determining-condition (*adhipati-pratyaya*).[4]

The cause is by definition what 'produces'. Therefore, if an entity produces another entity, that is, if their relationship is similar to that of a seed and its sprout, it is called the first condition, or cause-condition (*hetu*).

[1]Insofar as the production from itself of something that already exists is useless.

[2]That is impossible since half of that solution is invalidated by the refusal of a pre-existent substance.

[3]It is a totally insufficient eventuality, and it is right to reject it without giving it much consideration.

[4]*MMK*, I, 2. See *supra*, pp. 13-5.

If something, when it is produced, is inherent to something else, as for example a sensation, that is always inherent to a base, that is called its basic-condition (*ālambana*).[1]

The antecedent-condition (*samanantara*) for the production of an effect is the cessation of its material cause, as for example the prior destruction of the seed is the condition for the production of the sprout.

The determining-condition or leading-condition (*adhipati*) is that decisive element that allows, since it is efficient, the effect to appear inevitable.

These are the four types of possible conditions. If there are other circumstances, prior to, concomitant with or following the event, they are to be included in one of these four conditions. A supreme God or divinity and other similar superior conditions do not exist. So Nāgārjuna states that there can be no fifth condition.

The entities rise up for the above-stated conditions, that obviously do not identify with the thing that is produced.

According to Candrakīrti, for the Mādhyamikas not even entities which are co-ordinated or produced by conditions exist, which are separated from them in a substantial way.[2]

If the entities produced had had some pre-existence in their own causes and conditions, which are something different from them, only in this case could they appear from themselves. But they did not have it. Indeed, if there was such a pre-existence, it would be perceived and a new production would turn out to be totally useless. Thus the conditions and the causes of an entity do not contain any real existence of the effect. If they do not contain their real existence, they do not contain their existence of relation too. Existence, relation, production are synonyms. The production of something alien means a relation to it—a certain kind of pre-existence in it. That is impossible. It is, therefore, not correct to state that some entities can be produced from some conditions separate from them in a substantial way.

If the philosopher who states the origin of the entities from other entities, that are their causes, has been confuted, another

[1]Literally 'object'.

[2]Nāgārjuna says that under such conditions it is not possible to come across any self-existence of the entities. If the self-existence is lacking, then the existence of relation will also be missing. *MMK*, I, 3.

philosopher presents the theory of the origin of the entities through special energies. According to the latter, the organ of sight, the colours and the other causes of visual sensation do not directly produce visual sensations. They are called causes, insofar as they make energy rise up that effectively produces the visual sensation. The causes, as separate entities, do not produce the sensation. What is really produced is an energy inherent to the causes and creators of the sensations. It is analogous to the physical energy of heat which, for example, produces cooked rice.

Nāgārjuna answers this objection by pointing out how there is no energy in the causes, nor are there energies outside them. There are no causes without energies, nor are there causes that possess them,[1] and Candrakīrti explains that if an energy that produces a sensation really exists, it must be associated to such causes, as the organ of sight, colours etc. . . . But why is that impossible? Because then we would be asked whether this energy is supposed to appear when the sensation already exists or before it, or simultaneously with it.

The first alternative has to be rejected, because if the sensation has already been produced, the energy is useless. Indeed, it is supposed that the energy produces something: but if that has already been produced, what is the energy for? Neither can the existence of an energy be acknowledged in the causes prior to the sensation that is produced, as that energy cannot be outlined until the effect is absent. Finally, nor is the existence of an energy in the same moment as the production possible, as an entity is either already produced or not yet produced, and between these two moments no existence is given.

Since that energy cannot be placed in any of the three times—past, present or future—it does not exist. For this reason Nāgārjuna argues that there is no energy in the causes.

Candrakīrti had, however, already commented upon this point in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, where he had explained how, without anything that is characterized, there can be no characteristic outline.[2]

[1] *MMK*, I, 4.

[2] The non-existent son of a sterile woman cannot be characterized like the owner of a cow, since he did not exist; nor does he exist, nor will he exist. Non-existent energy cannot belong to a cause.

Therefore, could an energy exist by itself, without being the possessor of a cause? If there is no energy in the cause, neither can there be any outside them, because then it would be an uncaused energy.[1] Consequently, no energy really exists that produces entities.

If it is impossible to assume energies, then are the causes alone and without possessing any energy able to produce entities? But as energies do not exist, the causes are without energy, they are not efficient, they are not causes. Then how can they produce anything? It is clear that the causes cannot be owners of non-existent energies. That has been said with regard to an energy that produces sensations, and is applied to all other physical energies. The very word 'production' is thus meaningless.

The followers of the 'little vehicle' are however satisfied, because it has been proved that the entities, such as sensation, rise up from a certain connection with other entities, for instance, with the organ of sight, with the colours etc. . . . . This is what they mean when they say that the existence of an organ of sight, colours etc. . . . is the condition in which a visual sensation may arise.

But Nāgārjuna states that even that theory, according to which causation is the synonym of coordination, is false.[2]

If the sensation is an entity, whose origin is co-ordinated to a faculty of sight and other conditions, and these coordinations are called causes, then it is not clear that, right up to the moment in which the effect, that is, the sensation, has really arisen the organs of sight are nothing other than non-causes? Nothing can be produced from its non-causes: oil cannot be squeezed from grains of sand. And if the conditions started with being non-causes, but later on they turned into causes, combining with some other concomitant condition? That is not possible: that concomitant condition, concomitant to something that is not yet a condition, can be considered a condition, only if the other fact is really a condition. So we find ourselves faced with the same difficulty as before.

1 If there is no cloth beside the threads that make it up, that does not mean that the cloth pre-exists elsewhere, in a little straw.

2 *MMK*, I, 5: "The conditions are said to be so in that something conditioned by them is born. But if nothing is born, how can they be conditions?"

Nāgārjuna said that there can be logically no condition with regard to a thing that does not exist, nor regarding something that exists. Of something that does not exist, how can there be a condition? And what need does something that exists have of conditions?[1] If an entity is really existent, then it is totally useless to imagine the production-causes which produce it.

B. The Cause-Condition

After having demonstrated that the conditions are not causes in reality, since they do not have any capacity to produce effects, Nāgārjuna examines them separately, and proves that none of them taken singly are in reality a cause.

The followers of the 'little vehicle' maintain that the cause-condition (*hetu*) is very solid, since there is a definition of its essence.[2]

Nāgārjuna answers that objection by pointing out how the condition that produces effects[3] would exist, if its essence were something real. But since no entity, existent, non-existent, existent and non-existent, is in reality produced, how can there be a cause to produce it? Things being as they are, it is logically impossible[4]

Candrakīrti explains how producing means creating. If an element that can be produced were really produced, then a creative cause would produce it. But it is not produced, since there is absolutely nothing of the kind that needs to be produced, whether the thing existing, whether the thing not existing, or whether the thing including both.

Indeed, the thing that exists is not produced, because it already exists. Nor is the thing that does not exist produced, as it does not exist. Nor is the thing that at the same time exists and not exists produced, as those characteristics, that contradict themselves reciprocally, cannot be present in something, because

[1]*MMK*, I, 6.

[2]The definition, that is accepted here, is the following: a cause-condition is what 'produces'. If something is totally non-existent, no definition can be given of its existence: it would be as though someone had to instruct us on the essence of the non-existent child of a sterile woman.

[3]I.e. the condition is understood as a right and proper cause.

[4]*MMK*, I, 7.

if they existed, they would be subject to both criticisms. Thus, given that there is no production of effects from the point of view of the absolute truth, there will not even be any creative causes. Consequently the argument according to which the cause-condition must exist, because its essence has been defined, is not valid in the present case.

C. The Basic-Condition

Nāgarjuna then goes on to confute the existence of the second condition: the basic-condition (*ālambana*), that consists in the fact that every mental phenomenon has its own base, upon which it leans.[1]

Which are the entities in the system of the Hīnayāna that are characterized as the possessors of a base? They are thought (*citta*) and the immediate mental states (*caitta*). When thought is active and the immediate mental states are produced, they lean on some base which transcends them, whether they are a patch of colour or some other object that corresponds to the sensation. These are said to be the basic-conditions of these entities.

But, says Candrakīrti, is this basic-condition imagined for a sensation that already exists or for a sensation that has not yet been produced? In the first case the basic-condition becomes useless, as it is taken on in view of the production of a sensation. But then the latter really exists before the basic-condition has begun to act. Indeed, in this case the thought would exist by itself, separate from its own basic-condition. Why then imagine it influenced by an external base? The thought and other similar entities would thus seem to be existent and real, separate from their own bases. It is an illusion to call them possessors of a base. They would have absolutely no real relation to the bases.

As far as the second case is concerned, one could think that a sensation that does not yet exist has already got a base. But even this turns out to be impossible, since an entity that took its place in a system of other entities in a separate way from its base, is in any case an entity already in existence. Instead, imagining an

[1] *MMK*, I, 8: "The entities that, as you have taught, are provided with a base, are in reality deprived of it. And being deprived of it, wherever will a base still exist?"

entity which does not yet exist, combining with a base, is absolutely impossible.

D. The Antecedent-Condition

At this point Nāgārjuna confutes the notion of an immediately preceding moment of a chain of homogeneous and momentary existences, that the followers of the 'little vehicle' consider as a special condition: the antecedent-condition (*samanantara*). He says that until an entity is not born (for example, the sprout), the suppression of the other cannot logically be upheld (for example, the seed). So the antecedent-condition cannot logically exist. And, given that the other one is also suppressed, it cannot act as a condition at all.[1]

By the Hīnayāna followers, the antecedent-condition is understood in the sense that the immediately preceding destruction of the material cause is a condition of a production of the effect. But one must remember that, in a non-dualistic system, all the entities are considered to be non-produced, for example, a sprout is not considered a new creation. So it is clear that from this point of view the disappearance of the cause, the seed in its last moment, is impossible. In this case, there is no disappearing of the material cause, and so how can there be a moment that represents the immediately preceding condition for the production of the sprout?

The followers of the 'little vehicle' state that as all existence is a chain of separate moments, the disappearance of the seed must take place before the result appears. However, says Candrakīrti, if the seed is destroyed, it is converted into non-existence: what then is the cause of the sprout? Or, what is the cause that destroyed the seed? Both of them are without a cause.

Since one assumes that the sprout has not yet been produced in the instant in which the seed has already disappeared, both of these occurrences, that is, the disappearance of the seed and the appearance of the sprout, are without a cause. For this reason an immediately preceding existence, separate and momentary, like a cause, that is the antecedent-condition, is impossible.

[1] *MMK*, I, 9.

E. THE DETERMINING-CONDITION

Finally, Nāgārjuna denies the existence of a determining-condition (*adhipati*), saying that if the entities are deprived of their own nature, they have no real existence. The formula, "this being, that arises", thus means nothing.[1]

According to the Hīnayāna followers, the determining-condition is that special fact that, being present, the effect inevitably appears. But, says Candrakīrti, since all the separate entities have only a conditioned origin from the point of view of the absolute truth and no real and independent existence, the definition of the causation that is expressed in the words: "this being, that arises", means absolutely nothing. What, in fact, is the meaning of the word 'this', that is supposed to indicate a cause, and what is the meaning of the word 'that', which is supposed to indicate its effect? Certainly, a definition is given, but with it the causality is not established.

The followers of the 'little vehicle' can raise one more objection. After having observed that a piece of cloth is made from threads, they conclude that the existence of threads is a necessary condition for the existence of a piece of cloth.

The Mādhyamikas answer that, from the point of view of the absolute truth, it is exactly the production of these separate effects, like the cloth, that is definitely denied. How can it be admitted that their supposed conditions are really causes?[2]

Candrakīrti explains how indeed the cloth does not exist in the threads, in the weaving brushes, in the frame, in the shuttle, in the pegs or other conditions taken singly. In none of these things is some cloth perceived. Besides, from a plurality of conditions one would expect a plurality of effects. And since the cloth does not exist in any of those things, taken singly, neither does it exist in all of them, taken collectively.[3]

If one admits that each single condition contributes in part

1*MMK*, I, 10.

2That the production of those effects, such as the cloth, is in the final analysis unreal. This Nāgārjuna expresses in the following words: "The supposed effect does not rest by itself in any one of these conditions, nor together in all of them. How can one extract from them what has not even existed in them?" (*MMK*, I, 11).

3I.e. in the threads, in the frame, in the shuttle, etc.

to the general effect, one is thus obliged to admit that every effect is produced apiece at a time. Since there is really no effect, not even the existence of the conditions can be admitted, as separate entities.

Nāgārjuna continues by saying that, if the effect coming from the conditions is upheld, even though it is not present in them, however such an effect does not also come from the non-conditions?[1] Perhaps a piece of cloth is produced from straw or from sand, that are not its conditions?

The Hīnayāna followers may object that, if the effect were really an entity and its conditions were something separate, the Mādhyamika's preoccupations regarding the question of whether the effect pre-exists or not in the conditions could be understood. If, on the contrary, the effect includes its own conditions in itself, and if the presence of the group of all the conditions of a given effect is equivalent to the production of the latter, every difficulty vanishes.

Nāgārjuna replies that, if the conditions do not exist in themselves, how can an effect come from conditions that do not exist in themselves, and in addition, exist in non-existent conditions?[2] And if those of the Hīnayāna reply by saying that in this case there is a relationship of possession between an effect and its conditions, that is, that the effect is simply a modification of its own conditions, that is not correct, as such supposed conditions do not possess their own 'self', they are not really existent conditions.

It has been stated that a piece of cloth consists of threads. The cloth could thus be a reality, if the threads themselves had their own reality. But they consist of parts and are themselves modifications of their own parts: they are not at all the last reality. So what use is there to state that the effect, in this case a cloth, consists of threads, when the very same threads are not the final reality, they are not the "possessors of themselves?" Indeed, the cloth exists in its threads and, in their turn, the threads exist in something else. How can these threads, they themselves unreal, produce the reality in something else?

Nāgārjuna, concluding this first chapter of this 'Stanzas of the

[1] *MMK*, I, 12. [2] *MMK*, I, 13.

Middle Way', states that the effect does not exist in the conditions, nor does it exist in the non-conditions, and as the effect does not exist, how can there be conditions and non-conditions?[1]

So there is no condition that possesses the effect, argues Candrakīrti again. But perhaps there could be an effect without any condition? No, that is not possible: there is no effect external to its own antecedent condition. And if the reality of a piece of cloth is not explained well enough by the reality of the threads that make it up, it does not mean that it will be better explained by the reality of the straw, with which mats are made.

The followers of the 'little vehicle' insist on saying that one can even admit, in the interests of the argument, that there is no effect. However, in the phenomenal world the existence of a regularity is undeniable, according to which some facts appear to be co-ordinated unlike others, that do not seem to be so. If there is no effect produced by the conditions, and if all the existence consists in separate moments that follow each other, however certain facts appear only after those with which they are co-ordinated in a series, and do not appear with the same evidence after facts with which they are not? One cannot refuse to acknowledge a strict regularity in the phenomenal world. If the supposed effects, such as the cloth or the mat, were non-existent, the facts with which they are co-ordinated, that is, the threads and the straw, would never be called conditions. In this sense, the followers of the 'little vehicle' state the reality of the effects.

Candrakīrti answers by saying that there would be a real effect, should the conditions really exist. It could, therefore, be distinguished that, given a certain effect, such and such facts are its conditions, such and such other facts are not its conditions. But if one examines these conceptions in a critical way they reveal themselves not to be real. So, there being no effect, how can there be conditions and non-conditions? Candrakīrti concludes that no coordination is given between the separate entities, whenever they are considered from the point of view of the ultimate truth, the absolute one (*paramārthasatya*).

In accordance with that, it can be read in the *Āryaratnākarasūtra*

[1]*MMK*, I, 14.

that the way of being of the things (*dharmatā*)[1] was revealed by the Buddha: it is not born, it does not live, it does not die, it does not decay and all the beings are fused in it. If one thing has not any essence in itself, how can it receive an essence from outside? There is nothing internal, nor are there external things. Such an absolute condition of quiescence, where every individuality disappears, has been revealed by the Buddha.

With this memory of the Buddha and his words, that indicate the 'middle way', Candrakīrti ends his own commentary on the first chapter of the 'Stanzas of the Middle Way' by Nāgārjuna, which is dedicated to the 'Critique of the Conditions'.

[1]The elements (*dharma*) do not exist as entities separate (*svabhāva*): only their way of being (*dharmatā*) exists.

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